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**The Influence of Christian Spirituality on the Emotional Responses to
Divorce Experiences of African American and Hispanic Women**

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Phyllis G. Collins, LPC, LMFT


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**The Influence of Christian Spirituality on the Emotional Responses to
Divorce Experiences of African American and Hispanic Women**

Phyllis G. Collins



Becky L. Towne, DMin, HGST President



Jake Porter, EdD, Project Development Director

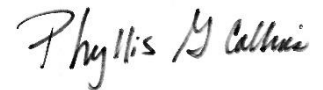


Jerry L. Terrill, DSM, Specialization Director

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Abstract

With rampant divorce cases in contemporary society, this study presents an investigation of the coping skills of Christian African American and Hispanic women in divorce cases. The main objective was to explore the emotional impact that these women exhibited post-divorce, how their spirituality helped them cope, and how their spiritual faith may have increased since it was posited that religion influences individual beliefs.

This study also investigated the influence of Christianity on individuals and how religious beliefs affected their emotional responses to traumatic experiences in their lives. The participants had to meet the following criteria: (a) Black/African American or Hispanic women, (b) working females with post-secondary education or a homemaker, (c) pre- or post-divorced, (d) Christian spirituality or Catholic beliefs, and (d) Texas residents. Snowball sampling was used in addition to criterion sampling to identify persons who knew others with information relevant to the study. Informed consent was obtained from all selected participants before they could begin the study. Results of the study provided five primary themes with the following subthemes: Health, Relationships, Spirituality, Finances, and Life Goals.

Keywords: African American, Black, Hispanic, women, pre-divorce, post-divorce, Christian spirituality, grief, coping, resilience, Wheel of Life, hope, emotional expressions, negative experiences, phenomenological, transcendental

Chapter 1: Introduction

Divorce is a stressful event that causes an individual to change different processes of their lives. Divorce experience can cause one to feel grief and loss. The research study explored the emotional responses of African American and Hispanic women's post-divorce experiences. The study investigated how respondents' Christian spirituality helped them to cope with the dissolution of their marriages, highlighting the specific emotional experiences of the journey of African American and Hispanic women toward newfound resiliency and hope.

Need for the Study

Undoubtedly, how one reacts to trauma is essential in shaping the next segment of their life. If the trauma is poorly handled, one's life can proceed down an undesirable route. How individuals handle grief, loss, or any other traumatic issue is critical in determining their next phase of life. For example, some are able to thrive while others are not strong enough to withstand life's challenges. Research has shown that most people do recover from life crises or life stressors (Alim et al., 2008). When life stressors become too much for some to handle, however, psychological traumas occur and can cause severe mental problems such as depression, anxiety, fear, and physical illnesses, among others (Moos, 2012).

Various types of crises or situations can have a bearing on how well an individual responds to the crisis and required transitions. Moos (2012) provided an example regarding the difference between experiencing the stress of divorce versus the death of a spouse. The difference is that death is seen as a final act and not reversible, whereas individuals can separate several times before deciding to divorce. These distinctive types

of stressors call for those involved to seek out different types of coping mechanisms and social supports based on each specific situation. As a mental health counselor, the researcher has observed that some divorced women come to counseling expressing their experience with grief and loss due to the dissolution of their marriage. Ellison et al. (2010) highlighted research that found a lesser relationship attributed among people of color. These findings are relevant because marital disruption is found to have negative consequences for an individual's emotional and physical health and overall well-being (Phillips & Sweeney, 2003).

Benefits of the Study

There is limited research on the divorce experiences of African American/Black and Hispanic women compared to their White counterparts. As a mental health counselor, it has been the researcher's experience that the societal challenges of African American/Black and Hispanic women enhance their emotional experiences both pre- and post-divorce. There are no known counseling therapies that specifically address these emotional challenges. Information about culture and divorce may provide additional insight in facilitating positive life changes for these women. Therefore, this study may be beneficial for both future research and professional practice.

Current Status of the Problem

African American/Black and American Hispanic women comprise the highest degree of divorce in American society. One reason provided is that economic disparities provide added stress to the marriage relationship (Lamanna et al., 2018). Raley et al. (2015) depicted race and ethnicity factors in marriage development and stability. African American and American Hispanic women have the highest divorce ratio of any other

ethnic groups in the country compared to dominant Whites, multicultural women, Asians, and American Indians. Black women have higher rates of marital volatility (Molina, 2008; Raley et al., 2015). Reasons can be attributed to variables, such as being in a larger social context that creates greater stressors for Black families, caring for fictive kinfolk, discrimination, taking others into the household, and, for some households, placing a tremendous amount of responsibility on the woman to care for the children while absorbing others into the household (Johnson & Loscocco, 2015). Research shows that Hispanic and Black women spend less than half of their marriage years being married compared to their White counterparts (Ellison et al., 2010), thus showing that the group is more likely to divorce at some point in their marriage. Studies show that this is more frequent among Black women than Hispanic women (Bulanda & Brown, 2007; Lamanna et al., 2018; Molina, 2008).

Foundations of the Study

As a mental health professional working with grief and loss, the researcher has noted how individuals experiencing divorce often ask questions about a significant life tragedy and its being allowed to occur. A number of clients ask why they are being punished and what they could have done differently to keep their marriage together. Others may express relief and happiness that their marriages ended yet remain angry about spending the amount of time in the marriage along with experiencing shame and guilt. Emotion researchers identify six basic feelings: anger, fear, disgust, sadness, surprise, and happiness (Ekman, 2003; Izard, 1994; Tomkins, 1962). Guilt and shame are principal causes of conflict in addition to the six basic feelings (Cashwell & Young, 2020).

According to Frederickson (2013), “Feelings are where we focus the therapy” (p. 23). Individuals can brand reactions as feelings and are consciously aware of those senses in the physical body; this gives individuals a personality (Damasio, 1994, 1999).

Emotions help create self-image, mobilize people to act, and drive them to pursue their goals (Tomkins, 1962). Emotions provide insight into where people are and the roadmap to get there; they help individuals know what they want or do not want, the pleasure and pain of things they experience, and how they share their values with others, transmitted culturally through generations.

Chances for escalation in anxiety and depression occur when clients hide behind defenses in counseling sessions (Frederickson, 2013). Therapists must help clients experience their feelings. Welcoming emotions, a tool used by therapists, is a counseling intervention and is used by mental health counselors as an assessment of identifying a client’s replies to assist with treatment planning (Frederickson, 2013).

In order to obtain a comprehensive understanding about a client’s lived experience, the therapist must take a “not-knowing stance” when entering into the client’s world, therefore, understanding how the client feels about the problem (Anderson, 1997; Anderson & Goolishian, 1991). Counselors allowing a healthy curiosity approach with the client will explore how clients’ views affect the way they see the problem, incorporating how cultural, religious, and spiritual perspectives influence their views. Although similarities exist among individuals experiencing divorce, the counselor or therapist should look at the importance of culture when working with people who come for counseling. “Worldview influences client’s thoughts, feelings, and behaviors and is

central to understanding the unique perspective that contribute to both the client's pain and . . . potential" (Cashwell & Young, 2020, p. 91).

Ethically relevant to accessing culture is identifying with clients' worldviews and understanding their ethnicity, racial background, and spirituality to obtain a holistic view of clients in counseling. According to Cashwell and Young (2020), "Culturally competent, ethical counselors must be cognizant of ways cultural identities can influence the counseling process" (p. 60). Counseling techniques need to have realistic validation and compatibility with patient values (Cashwell & Young, 2020).

No less than 89% of people in the United States report that they believe in God or divine energy. Specifically, 56% report a belief in the biblical God (Fahmy, 2018). Therapists can have increased understanding about their clients when they actively obtain comprehension about their many sacred and divine practices (Cashwell & Young, 2020). Specifically, as the need for the therapist's counseling practice becomes more trauma-informed, the understanding of how spirituality can aid with increasing clients' coping skills rather than suppressing and avoiding emotions becomes equally paramount (Briere & Scott, 2013). Literature shows a parallel between spirituality and psychology (Wilber, 2000). Many of the components required for spiritual growth are psychological (Cashwell & Young, 2020). Psychological and spiritual development often are involved in a calamity or turning point within a person's life (Cashwell & Young, 2020).

"A psychospiritual crisis is accompanied by struggle, eventually a resolution, and finally a new sense of expanded stability" (Cashwell & Young, 2020, p. 35). Certain components of religion and culture are a part of the "cultural mix" for racial/ethnic minority clients in the United States (Cashwell & Young, 2020, p. 104). The Black

church is the central foundation stone for African American life. Similarly, Hispanic individuals who have their own history combatting immigration and poverty have sought religious establishments, which also function as sanctuaries (Cashwell & Young, 2020). Therefore, it is imperative that counselors include the cultural and spiritual values and ethnicity of pre- and post-divorce Black and Hispanic women in counseling, because, according to Cashwell and Young (2020), “If clients perceive counselors to be in opposition to their religious, spiritual, and cultural authorities, they may terminate the counseling relationship prematurely” (p. 108).

In the researcher’s professional experience as a mental health counselor, Black and Hispanic pre- and post-divorce women who use their Christian faith as a way to cope with their divorce experience welcome using culture and Christianity as a part of their counseling. Currently, however, the researcher has not encountered any known therapies or research that holistically address the experience of this population when coming to counseling in order to facilitate finding new meaning in their lives. Therefore, this study addressed lived experiences to holistically identify the essence of their experience.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of African American/Black and Hispanic divorced women and how their Christian beliefs influenced their resiliency.

Research Question

What are the lived experiences of divorced Black and Hispanic Christian women, and in what context did they experience divorce?

Delimitations

This study did not focus on the following: the effect of men on divorce, cohabitation as a forerunner to divorce, blended families, and adult children's divorce experiences.

Definitions

African American/Black: When used in the study, the term *Black* encompasses all persons from this origin, including African American.

Agency thinking: A perceived capability to use one's pathways to reach desired goals (Lamanna et al., 2018).

Children: For this study, the term includes *biological* and *stepchildren* of the participants or children born outside of the marriage union with participants and their ex-spouses.

Christian spirituality: According to McGrath (2015), this "concerns the quest for a fulfilled and authentic Christian existence, involving the bringing together of the fundamental ideas of Christianity and the whole experience of living on the basis of and within the scope of the Christian faith" (p. 13).

Divorce: According to Merriam-Webster (2022b), divorce is a legal action to dismiss; disconnection or separation of the material and the divine.

Grief: The anguish experienced after a significant loss (APA, 2020a); grief is the response to any type of loss (Good Therapy, 2019).

Hispanic: The word *Hispanic* is used interchangeable with *Latino*. For this research study, it refers to American Hispanic in the United States who identify as Hispanic or Latina (Lopez et al., 2021).

Homemaker: “[O]ne who manages a household especially as a spouse and parent”
(Merriam-Webster, 2022c).

Meaning making: Psychological depiction of potential connection between objects,
occurrences, and relations (Park, 2010).

Pathway thinking: An individual’s ability to create viable ways for their desired purposes
(Snyder et al., 2002).

Post-divorce: According to Merriam-Webster (2022d), “coming after a divorce; legal
dissolution of a marriage” (para. 1).

Pre-divorce: Preparing for divorce; period before finalizing the legal divorce.

Professional: A person engaged or qualified relating to job that requires special education,
training, or skill (Merriam-Webster, 2022e).

Resilience: According to van de Meer et al. (2018), resilience is an individual’s ability to
sustain a reasonably steady and vigorous level of physical and psychological
functioning when challenged with potentially traumatic events.

Spirituality: According to McGrath (2015), “Spirituality concerns the quest for a fulfilled
and authentic religious life, involving the bringing together of the ideas distinctive
of that religion and the whole experience of living on the basis of and within the
scope of that religion” (p. 2). Specifically for this study, two types of Christian
spirituality beliefs were explored as studies show that the majority of Black and
Hispanic people practice their faith within these denominations:

- a. Catholicism: The “largest form of Christianity in the world” (McGrath,
2015, p. 14). The Catholic definition of spirituality is “the unfolding, day
by day, of that fundamental decision to become or remain a Christian

which we make at baptism, repeat at confirmation, and renew each time we receive the eucharist” (Reiser, 1994, p. 2).

- b. Protestantism: In terms of spirituality, here there is “emphasis on public and private reading of the Bible” (McGrath, 2015, p. 18). The focus is on Jesus Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection (McGrath, 2015).

Working class: “Class of people who work for wages usually at manual labor” (Merriam-Webster, 2022f, para. 2).

Procedural Overview

A phenomenological approach to this qualitative study was used, and the transcendental phenomenological method was chosen for this study. First, the focus was on the participants’ lived experiences and the essence of these experiences. Second, Moustakas’ (1994) transcendental phenomenology and analysis utilized systematic and rigorous procedures. The researcher reviewed articles and dissertations conducted between 2010 and 2018 on these topics to obtain relevant results for the study; the preliminary research was done on the World Health Organization database. Further, literature was collected and reviewed from a variety of databases such as PUBMED. Based upon the research design used for this study, preliminary data were collected from ten divorced African American/Black and Hispanic women aged 33–57 years old.

Snowball sampling was used in addition to criterion sampling to identify “cases of interest from people who know people who know what cases are information-rich” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 159). Saturation is reached when fresh knowledge acquired does not offer additional awareness into the group (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher’s bias prior to the study was assessed using *epoché*, bracketing personal

experiences and “setting aside prejudgments, opening up the research interview with unbiased, receptive presence” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 177). Informed consent was obtained from all participants before the study began. Data collection was conducted using a demographic questionnaire and semi-structured interviews via telephone.

For the semi-structured interviews conducted with participants, the researcher constructed interview questions applicable to the research question so that important features of the research study were covered while allowing for participants to discuss other information that may be pertinent (Peoples, 2021). Data analysis involved transcribing interview responses, coding the transcripts, and then identifying common themes. Specific procedures for analysis followed Moustakas’ (1994) Modified Van Kamp Analysis. According to Moustakas (1994), the Modified Van Kamp Analysis Method steps involve:

1. Horizontalization: List every expression related to the experience.
2. Reduction and elimination: Eliminate those that are overlapping, recurring, and imprecise.
3. Cluster and thematize the invariant constituents.
4. Final identification of the invariant constituents and themes by application through validating the invariant constituents and the associated theme alongside the entire record of every participant in the study.
5. Using the pertinent authenticated invariant constituents and themes, create an individual textural portrayal of the experience for each participant, including verbatim examples from the transcribed interview.

6. Create an Individual Structural Description of the experience based on the individual textural description and imaginative variation for each study participant.
7. Incorporating the invariant constituents and themes, create a combination of meaning and core of the experience.
8. From the individual textural-structural descriptions, develop a composite description of the meanings and essences of the experiences, representing the group as a whole.

Research Assumptions

Clarifying and identifying potential bias before and during data collection and afterwards is vital. The researcher had to consider the fact that she is divorced, which led her to need to mitigate her own bias. Other potential areas of bias were that the researcher is a woman of color and a female; therefore, asking questions could cause bias or, conversely, as a person of color, she could obtain a more accurate response from the participants. The researcher aimed to ask neutral questions, allowing a “not-knowing stance” and using curiosity to influence the participant’s responses to reflect their lived experiences without external influence. Using the participants’ own language and allowing their language to speak for itself also helped provide bias-free answers to the research questions.

One of the greatest challenges the researcher faced as a counselor, however, was facilitating therapy surrounding clients’ religious beliefs regarding whether divorce was an acceptable religious action. Having these resources would have made a difference in the researcher’s counseling, because she particularly likes knowing that she is reflectively

listening and that this helps clients by staying in the “now.” Also, listening to participants helps identify how self-esteem appears to enter into many client cases, especially among those who experience trauma.

Therapists asking clients how they view triggers is relevant. Once triggers are identified, the therapist and clients work together to recreate another way of talking about their situations. Observing how reflective listening is useful in the therapy process, the same held true in the interviews with the participants. Through use of collaboration and shared inquiry with the participants, they had the opportunity to share their lived experiences with the divorce process.

Learned helplessness is a condition or concept where the individual is exposed to a diverse stimulus repeatedly. This can become conditional in the brain to believe that one cannot do anything about a circumstance; examples of this are depression and anxiety. Some participants, who are experiencing divorce, may use learned helplessness as they discuss having depression and/or anxiety. Women of color have spoken of not being able to stop ruminating over events or situations in their minds, and, consequently, feeling that there was no hope for them or their situations.

Summary

In sum, it has been the researcher’s experience as a mental health counselor that divorced women experience grief and loss due to the dissolution of their marriage. Ellison et al. (2010) showed that persons of color are more likely to be exposed to lower relationship quality. Together, African American/Black and Hispanic women comprise the highest divorce level in American society. There are no known counseling therapies that specifically address these emotional challenges. Information about culture and divorce

may provide additional insight in facilitating positive life changes for these women.

Therefore, this research may be beneficial for both future research and professional practice.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Modern-day society has been branded by unparalleled rates of divorce. According to the American Psychological Association (APA), married American couples divorce roughly 40–50%. Many of these couples will not stay married past their 20th marriage anniversary (APA, 2020b). Particularly, women are more likely to suffer with significant impact from the divorce experience, due to male-controlled norms and inequality (Leopold, 2018). According to the Centers for Disease Control/National Center for Health Statistics (CDC/NCHS), National Vital Statistics System divorce rates in Texas in 2019 were 2.1%. This rate is based upon every 1,000 for the overall inhabitants living in a region. This number is the latest information and includes requests for divorce filed or legal separations for various counties or states (CDC, 2020). Texas allows 60 days after a petition is filed, unless family violence is involved, to finalize the divorce (Texas State Library, 2021).

African American and Hispanic women form the group with the highest divorce rate in American society. Statistics show that black and Hispanic women have the highest divorce ratio of other ethnic groups in the United States, such as whites, multicultural women, Alaskan Natives, Asians, American Indians, and foreign-born Hispanic women (Lamanna, 2018; Raley et al., 2015). While increased disparity has added to a larger divorce rate among uneducated White people (Raley et al., 2015), Black people encounter a greater probability of spousal disruption than White or Mexican American people due to decreased spousal quality (Bryant et al., 2010; Bulanda & Brown, 2007; Kreider & Ellis, 2011). Research shows that Hispanic and Black women spend less than half of their married years than their White counterparts as married. Whites have more years of

marriage than Hispanic and Black women due to not having the same societal challenges (Ellison et al., 2010). The practice shows that the group is more likely to divorce at some point in the marriage, and studies show that divorce is more prevalent among Black women than Hispanic women (Lamanna, 2018). In the same study, the reason cited for the higher probability for the increased divorce rate among Blacks is economic disadvantage. In addition, marriage may provide less societal, mental, and financial means than for Whites due to racial discrimination (McLoyd et al., 2000).

Furthermore, researchers have also studied religious beliefs in assisting divorced women as a whole, including African Americans and Hispanics coping with divorce, according to Lawson and Satti (2016), Chambers and Kravitz (2011), and Cashwell and Young (2020). Alim et al. (2008) postulated that a substantial connection among religious conviction, spirituality, and psychological wellbeing. How people handle grief and loss, or any other traumatic issue, is critical in determining the next phase of life. Acute mental health problems such as depression and anxiety can be caused by mental disturbances (Moos, 2012). This literature review explores divorce and how associated grief/trauma is handled with a specific focus on African American and Hispanic women, as well as how religion impacts their journey.

Specifically, the main objective of this study was to investigate or explore the emotional impact that African American/Black and Hispanic women pre- and post-divorce exhibit and how their spirituality helps them cope and increase their spiritual faith. This study did not focus on the following: the effect of men on divorce, cohabitation as a prerequisite to divorce, blended families, and adult children's divorce experiences.

Theoretical Framework

This study is guided by the conceptual framework *Wheel of Life Model*. The Wheel of Life was originated many thousands of years ago by Buddhist monks. The Wheel of Life is a symbolic representation of recurring presence found on the external walls of Tibetan Buddhist temples and monasteries in the Indo-Tibetan region. It is a graphic illustration exhibiting basic Buddhist constructs in a simplified approach that can be understood by unlearned people (Sopa, 1984). Buddhist constructs can be reviewed for future generations (Groves, 2014).

The concept of the Wheel of Life, however, has evolved and has been developed under several categories, including weight management (Anderson, 2016), work stress (Byrne, 2005), and in positive psychology, most notably by a Christian named Paul Meyer. Meyer created the Wheel of Life in 1960 to assist persons in achieving their goals. As the owner of the Success Motivation Institute, Meyer gained widespread notoriety for being a pioneer of the personal development industry (Meyer, n.d.).

The Wheel of Life is useful for change, as it identifies six to eight areas of an individual's life. These include emotional, physical, career, spiritual, relationships (including relationship to self), finances, hobbies, and environment. Assessing these areas helps to determine how balanced one's life is.

Using a Wheel of Life to represent one's life is exhibited in several secular and divine cultures. Therefore, it can be used in a number of ways, but principally to help live an individual's existence with a sense of balance (Byrne, 2005). Therefore, the Wheel of Life tool was used as a guide to assist in developing interview questions for the study where participants could identify their lived experiences with pre- and post-divorce

participants, using eight components. Examples of questions asked of the participants are listed here (see Appendix A for interview questions):

1. *Emotional health*: How did you experience emotions due to the divorce?
2. *Physical health*: How did your divorce experience impact your physical health?
3. *Career*: How has the divorce affected your work?
4. *Finance*: How were your finances affected by divorce?
5. *Relationships*: How are your relationships with friends, coworkers, and church members impacted by the divorce experience? If affected, was it more before or after the divorce?
6. *Intellectual pursuits/hobbies*: Did you use hobbies, volunteering to assist you in adjusting to your new life after divorce? If so, what was your experience?
7. *Life goals*: How did you choose to create new life goals after the divorce?
8. *Spiritual development/Christian spirituality*: How did your Christian spirituality affect the grief process during and after the divorce?

Wheel of Life Application for Research on African American Women and Divorce

There is a limited amount of research on African American/Black women's pre- and post-divorce experiences compared to Whites and non-Hispanic Whites (Molina, 2008; Phillips & Sweeney, 2003). As a mental health provider, it has been the researcher's experience that societal challenges of African American/Black women enhance their emotional experiences in pre- and post-divorce episodes. Applying the conceptional framework of the Wheel of Life aided in identifying their lived experiences.

Overview of the Literature

Grief, Loss, Trauma, and Divorce

Emotional responses to grief are varied. Though grief is usually seen in terms of a loved one's death, it can be brought on by any form of loss. The response to loss is sometimes analyzed by the Kubler-Ross model (Kubler-Ross, 1969). There are no clearly defined stages of grief for most people, as it is always a unique process where someone may simply experience a portion of the emotions as described by the Kubler-Ross model (Kubler-Ross, 1969). The stages of grief with the application of the Kubler-Ross model with divorced women is as follows.

Denial and Disbelief

According to Kniskern (2008) and Doak (2019), those who experience divorce have a tremendous loss—divorce resembles a death without an individual actually dying. Early in the post-divorce stage once an individual imagines the ending of the marriage, they may become emotionally crushed or devastated and feel distressed with little to no emotional provision. For some, the results of their thinking can be extremely clear. Conversely, those who do not consider these thoughts to have any poignant influence might be inclined to discount their emotional states and to continue running demanding lifestyles or extending themselves to pursue remedies by shifting between intimate relationships, possibly being entangled with compulsive behaviors such as food addiction or drug abuse.

Women wish for and request a divorce for several reasons. First, some women no longer want a marital relationship because they feel that they have fallen out of love with their spouse. Second, women or their husbands may have had at least one affair, have

outgrown their marriage partners, or have stayed for the children. Once the children are grown, women believe they can live their life for themselves, as they perceive that their spouses are not emotionally invested in the marriage; for example, not wanting to participate in the household responsibilities or emotionally invest in the intimate portion of the marital relationship.

With denial, the person is likely to have a steady change to some appearance of ambiguity subsequent to the dissolution of the marriage. Amid experiencing a negative response, people attempt to hold onto optimism after learning that their lives were altered and, most likely, permanently changed. If a person does not let go of this type of response, however, circumstances would not be confronted reasonably. Recurrent and ineffective efforts to trying a miracle remedy can result in the sense of despair and helplessness because sustained stress can yield depleted resources as seen in reduced health, learned helplessness, and social back-up exhaustion (Cohn et al., 2009). Grief responses can develop into a problem (Delespaulx et al., 2013). The feelings of rejecting the divorce or loss may cause divorced women to feel emotionally empty or unable to discover meaning for their futures. Gaining self-control over mental and physical health conditions with learned strategies such as stress reduction and pacing, and increased self-care using grounding strategies, such as progressive muscle relaxation strategies (Briere & Scott, 2013), can assist with repairing the feeling of powerlessness as they create the feelings of strength.

Fear and Worry

Feeling distressed and anxious are familiar responses due to the ambiguity and instability of divorce (Bell et al., 2018). For example, one may be disturbed about their

future without their spouse, or how day-to-day interactions will develop. If there are children, for example, the person who had a spouse to assist is now a single parent with more responsibilities than when the spouse was living in the residence prior to the divorce. In addition, if the wife had low self-esteem before the marriage, as a single person she may have doubt that she can handle increased responsibilities that are now new (Thomas & Ryan, 2008). In the researcher's experience as a mental health counselor, finances are the number one cause of incredible stress, as a newly single person or single parent may require leaving a residence and/or community or paying for housing on one's own. This often results in a heightened level of anxiety.

Based on these circumstances, persons may undergo feelings that their very existence is unmanageable. Divorced women need to improve self-management skills to become better equipped to manage these stressors. Pacing oneself, alongside organizational and effective time management skills, is constantly needed in sustaining strength and removing doubt as the circumstances becomes more foreseeable. Furthermore, divorced women need to engage in positive self-talk to assist with negative internal dialogue (Doak, 2019).

Since anxiety is always correlated with muscle tension, adopting relaxation processes can disrupt the link connecting physical responses and feelings. It is unlikely for a person to feel worried when the body is in a peaceful state; for example, by using meditation, breath training, changing body temperature, or exercising (Marra, 2004).

It is also relevant that an individual remains sensitive to delicate conversations while trying to adjust, as it can aid with avoiding distress. For example, it could possibly be that during the marriage, the person was the one to whom other family members came

for a listening ear or comfort with their own struggles. Additionally, the family culture may be one of being strong-minded during adverse situations. Following divorce, the person requires more comfort and wants to let others know about needs but feels inadequate to say so because of fear of a negative appearance to others. Decisively having adequate understanding and basic information regarding divorce can be exceptionally constructive in steering clear of any nervousness (Doak, 2019). Too much discomfort about the future can lead to assuming inaccurate information about one's destiny or to a lack of understanding about personal post-divorce decision-making.

Anger

Anticipated effects such as resentment, bitterness, disappointment, or indignation result from an undesired life shift due to something beyond an individual's decision-making power or influence. Adjustment to one's existence, together with the disruption of daily schedules, can cause an individual to experience the natural emotional response of irritation. Ambiguity can also generate irritation because, to a greater extent, it has become increasingly challenging to prepare for the time ahead in one's place of work or in relation to social obligations. Loved ones may not recognize the purpose behind arranging or putting time for them on a schedule. The anger emotion is only customary and conceivably useful; however, it can be damaging if it steers off people who are eager to provide support (Kelly & Chan, 2012). Life events such as divorce create transitions and formulate challenges to meaning in life; transitions cause instability (Wheaton, 1990; Wojcik et al., 2021).

Sadness and Depression

Despair and grief are common in processes of divorce, along with vagueness, reaction to emotional hurts, and distress. Despair diminishes emotional suffering when the person can separate for a time to seek space for sorting out what has occurred. Sadness and depression can also occur due to extended periods of anguish in advance of finding a resolution. Extended times of harsh or unacceptable conduct in a marriage could lead to feelings of futility, specifically in cases of domestic violence (Yick, 2008). Largely, despair ceases at some point (Alim et al., 2008). If hopelessness and sadness persist for an extended period of time, the person will experience apathy or depression (Tavakol & Heidarei, 2015). Numerous approaches can be beneficial in coping with symptoms of depression. Self-help procedures, such as exuding gratitude, volunteering, and doing activities that can increase one's mood such as exercising or spending time with friends, assist to expel the idea that there are no prospects for a bright future. Moreover, changing one's thinking by reframing thoughts, being more present, and centering in the moment even with what appears to be a small positive aspect of life are promising strategies that can help when one feels depressed.

Other researchers, however, object to grief as part of the divorce experience. According to Chiriboga and Galston (1992), grief is not present. They assert that the spouse is alive; in the early stages, there is a question of whether the divorce will take place. Some think that putting down a spouse is an amusement; others fear that making fun of one another in relationship was meaningful and that those in the bereavement group had difficulty seeing anything bad about the former spouse.

Acceptance

Acceptance of the divorce involves several elements. First, the divorced woman needs to acknowledge that the former married life she had known has been altered. Even if she decides to remarry, the family dynamic will not be the same (Goetting, 1982). If a divorced woman chooses not to remarry, she will remain single, and if she has been married for several years, there will be even more adjustments post-divorce. Research shows that men are more likely to remarry than women in later-life divorce cases (Zulkarnain & Sanders, 2019).

Second, the divorced woman will need to relinquish her past life and future expectations as had been planned. For example, in a gray divorce, one may have been looking forward to retirement with one's mate, but once the children were grown, the spouse decided to divorce. With divorces being accepted more widely during later life, visions of future married life may not come to pass (Brown & Wright, 2019).

Third, the divorced woman will be required to change, saying farewell to the old self (i.e., a divorced woman may have identified herself based on the roles of wife and mother) and starting a new life.

Fourth, the divorced woman must be willing to create a new life for herself. For example, a divorced woman may have been a stay-at-home mother and now needs to find employment (Connidis, 2003; Moos, 2012) or move closer to her biological family for additional support. Divorced women must recognize a newfound realism regarding their circumstances in order to create a new lifestyle. It is advisable that divorced women learn new modes of being useful and increase their satisfaction in complicated, unfamiliar circumstances.

Similar to a bereaved person whose spouse is deceased, having to endure and complete tasks that were done by one's spouse (Worden, 2018), the divorced woman has to cope with doing things on her own. For example, as a married woman, she may have been accustomed to her spouse taking care of certain household duties. Following divorce, she must learn to do those things on her own. To accept her new situation, she should be open to listening to other divorced women's stories to find encouragement and to understand that a life of contentment and happiness is still possible post-divorce (Doak, 2019). Acceptance is a passage from the past life to a new life that the circumstance presents. The individual must reflect upon different means to enhance herself (Moos, 2012). Internal growth for a divorced woman provides a way for her to discipline herself towards an optimistic future.

In some cases, however, an individual can experience a particular feeling more than once or two different emotions simultaneously (Kniskern, 2008). Working through grief can sometimes yield a double benefit. The individual not only can solve the significant psychological problems that she has undergone, but this kind of work also helps them physically. The process of grieving is always related to the emergence of various symptoms; therefore, a timely resolution of the feelings of loss can help manage symptoms (Boss, 2011; Worden, 2018).

Common responses to traumatic events include intense distress, irritability, guilt, and depression. Largely, many of the responses to the hurting experiences are customary since they affect those who have endured comparable experiences. Shared indicators of severe grief responses, however, may include extended episodes of emotional tension, disturbing memories even with no signs of danger, and extreme dissociation symptoms.

Deferred reactions to traumatic events might involve incessant exhaustion and a reduced ability to focus properly due to depression, anxiety, sleep disruption, suicidal ideation, fear of recurrence, and other actions accompanying a traumatic event (Briere & Scott, 2013; Delespaulx et al., 2013). Additionally, if individuals are not well-appointed to cope with their post-traumatic problems, they can experience emotional or psychological consequences that would disorient them in their lives. Moreover, grief can cause an individual to feel like life is unrewarding without any meaning (Delespaulx et al., 2013; Worden, 2018). Therefore, significant performance of life responsibilities can become impaired (Drescher & Foy, 2010), such as health challenges or not being emotionally present for children or social responsibilities. Mindfulness-centered practices have been beneficial as interventions for counteracting grief reactions and for increasing wellbeing in an array of people (Chiesa et al., 2011).

Divorce

Studies have shown that divorce has multifaceted influences on women. For example, Tavakol and Heidarei (2015) emphasized that divorced people are subjected to feelings of depression and a troubled identity as their way of life has changed due to new circumstances and even difficulties in their professions and personal lives. These challenges occur as divorcees identify with those who have failed in their marriage relationships. Divorced women's lifestyles must adjust as they do not have current life partners with whom to share their emotive and economic problems. Rodriguez-Hanley and Snyder (2000) and Moos (2012) noted that although divorces also severely impact men, divorced women experience higher levels of emotional hurt than their ex-husbands. Research by Leopold (2018) revealed that gender differences in divorce outcomes for

women are long-lasting. The authors expressed that women's adverse outcomes are due to divorce ensuing from feeling incongruous, having a sense of social dismissal, not having a special important person to assist with life obligations, and making choices on their own (Rodriguez-Hanley & Snyder, 2000).

Divorce affects women because it involves a swift adjustment in their financial and social status (Milan, et al., 2011). Divorced women transfer from married to single, from being accommodating towards others to making provision for themselves, and from being their husbands' wives to being their ex-wives (Moos, 2012). As such, this sudden change can easily make women lose hope in their lives.

Depression also has a collective effect on divorced women. According to Chiriboga and Galston (1992), women over 40 years of age experience severe stress due to divorce because of difficulty in planning and in perceptions of how others view them. Higher rates of suicide, alcoholism, and high blood pressure occur due to divorce (Chiriboga & Galston, 1992). For Tavakol and Heidarei (2015), depression in divorced women is characterized by disturbance, negative thinking, a sense of uneasiness, and anxious emotions. These issues occur due to a lower quality of life after divorce and the woman's perceived deficit in her societal status. Rodriguez-Hanley and Snyder (2000) stressed that divorce leads to and develops women's feelings of loneliness. Some divorced women become lonesome when they no longer have contact with their husbands and the lost societal suitability of their beginning relationships. Some societies view marriage as a significant and acceptable aspiration for women. Due to these societal beliefs, women who are unable to maintain their marriages are seen as failures. Tavakol and Heidarei (2015) and Rodriguez-Hanley and Snyder (2000) offered unique points or

differences in the way each views divorce affects women, but they agree that divorced women may feel a sense of loss or feel like failures for being unsuccessful in keeping their husbands and retaining the family unit.

Role of Mental Health Support for Women Pre- and Post-Divorce

Given the high number of divorces in the United States, it has been the researcher's experience as a mental health professional that the demand for mental health support is increasing; as a result, caregivers have had to develop more ways to counsel and support. For example, mental health professionals should assist the client in developing a self-care plan, which could consist of boundary-setting, resilience, and helping pre- and post-divorce women find hope for the future following divorce by using goal setting, agency thinking, pathway thinking, and the process of change and transition. Mental health counselors can assist with self-care and encourage divorced women to increase in self-confidence.

Hope is an emotion that considerably stimulates a person's well-being and overall life quality (Redlich-Amirav et al., 2018). People with hope have greater self-confidence and self-worth and are more content than others with lower hope. Hope is a psychological element that is too intricate to describe. The complexity in defining hope occurs because hope is an aspect that incorporates numerous life components. Therefore, a fitting explanation of hope would define the various features and issues it encompasses. According to researchers, hope comprises expectations led by biologic, mental, emotional, and societal components.

According to Snyder et al. (2002), positive thinking aids in development of the confidence one can obtain to accomplish chosen ambitions and to develop enthusiasm to

use those passageways to achieve preferred goals. These researchers emphasize that hope is the wish to have plans and to exert efforts to accomplish them. Though not openly expressed, these claims suggest that hope is a future-oriented emotion. Hope makes individuals anticipate what they will do as goals can only be set for an upcoming timeframe. Future plans demonstrate one's determination to continue living since no one can design a plan for a time one does not want or wish to stay alive. Hence, hope is the yearning to subsist and achieve personal aspirations. Hope is an essential component for well-being. Redlich-Amirav et al. (2018) depicted hope as an encouraging emotion. They mentioned that it is a multifaceted, vibrant influence that makes individuals self-assured about triumphing in the time ahead (Redlich-Amirav et al., 2018). Individuals exert themselves toward their desired goals because they have the hope that their anticipated results will be fulfilled. Hope specifically involves the confidences, values, and actions that drive an individual to labor on the road to wide-ranging and explicit goals.

Amid any problems or complications, hope can also be described as the sentiment of expectancies that what is in store will outshine the past, thus influencing the individual to persevere (Redlich-Amirav et al., 2018). Difficult times obstruct individuals' brains with their attention on negative thinking, which includes hopelessness and fear. Regardless of these concerns, individuals nevertheless will place efforts toward their ambitions. The capacity to aspire to make an effort during troubled times is recognized as hope. An optimistic attitude in the midst of depressing thinking moves people to conquer the suppressing problems and succeed. As a result, hope is a fundamental emotion for all human beings as it empowers an individual to continue to be positive about themselves

and their circumstances. Assessing hope in divorced women is essential for establishing their welfare.

Optimism is a substantial display of hope. As Millstein et al. (2019) indicated, enthusiastic people are more likely to achieve their goals than are pessimistic people because they show initiative in the quest for achievement and exhibit enhanced endurance and the proficiency to deal with impediments or stumbling blocks. According to Alim et al. (2008), optimism is the overall propensity to shape one's positive outlook for a time to come. Optimism can create widespread upbeat prospects concerning the time ahead (Millstein et al., 2019).

Optimistic people stay confident irrespective of every condition. They identify as having the capability to succeed or complete their wishes for their lives. Those with high optimism levels display extraordinary expectations, trusting that their state of affairs will turn out well or in some way work out (Millstein et al., 2019). Optimism has been connected with decreasing stress and strengthening mental health (Alim et al., 2008). Consequently, these people continue to be irrepressible despite hardships. Optimistic people view troubles as fleeting and directly related to peripheral causes. As a result, this manner of thinking makes it possible for them to remain determined (Millstein et al., 2019). Identifying misfortunes related to outside forces, optimistic people evade condemnation for personal problems; instead, women both pre- and post-divorce see trials as sprints in which they can simply cope. Optimism is essential for divorced women dealing with struggles due to their marital breakups. Divorced women must stay confident that they are approaching a restored outlook for their future to overcome feelings of isolation, despair, and narrow-mindedness.

A necessary evaluation of hope includes one's competence in goal setting. Hope theory is the basis for the existence of hope. Hope theory presupposes that goal-directed activities are created by human behaviors (Snyder et al., 2002). When goals are established, people make evident their amount of hope. Individuals with superior capacity and drive to establish goals have a greater degree of hope. Others who are unhurried and do not have the enthusiasm to do so are at a lower level of hope. As a licensed mental health counselor working with women pre- and post-divorce, the researcher's plan for this research included evaluating two issues: pathway thinking and agency thinking in assessing participants' goal-setting abilities.

Pathway Thinking

People must identify as proficient at creating practical means or routes to meet their aspirations. Pathway thinking comprises this competency, and it denotes a person's capability to create feasible ways to reach their desired purposes (Snyder et al., 2002). Pathway thinking is a descriptor of hope. Those who demonstrate this thinking have a tendency to be incredibly self-confident in their skills and hopeful of their capacity to discover a means to attain their wishes. When individuals come across problems, pathway thinking is a necessity as it makes it possible for them to construct various passageways or routes to solve the problem. People exhibiting elevated hopes are effective in locating different paths to find resolutions.

Agency Thinking

The second part of the goal-setting capability is agency thinking. It is the perceived capability to use one's pathways to reach the desired goals (Snyder et al., 2002) as well as the motivation that people give themselves to work on their goals. It includes

self-talk agentic phrases; for example, when a person uses self-talk (i.e., they have the capability to accomplish a task) or employs internal dialogue statements, it reveals that nothing will prevent them from accomplishing a challenging undertaking (Snyder, et al., 2002). Despite complications, agency thinking pushes individuals to use the expected amount of incentive to the greatest alternative route. Therefore, hope consists of producing objectives and being encouraged to put much effort on the chosen objectives. A mental health counselor can help clients explore agency and pathway thinking goals to assist them with increased self-care and self-esteem.

As a mental health counselor and marriage and family therapist, the researcher has experienced clients seeking counseling both pre- and post-divorce. As a counselor, the researcher has utilized psychoeducation in creating a self-care plan using the Self-Care Wheel. Collaboratively with the client, therapists formulate self-care around seven primary areas: emotional, physical, spiritual, intellectual pursuits (e.g., hobbies), career, environmental issues, and personal relationships—including a relationship with oneself. In the researcher's professional experience, the Self-Care Wheel has been shown to elevate women's pre- and post-divorce resilience.

Mental Health Counselor's Boundaries

Setting boundaries is imperative when assisting clients in finding new meaning in their lives. For example, Bridges (1991) describes one being in limbo between one's old reality and an uncertain future. The mental health professional can assist clients by supporting and encouraging them to explore new pathways (Bridges, 1991).

Client Resilience in the Divorce Process

Life purpose is sharply related to recovery and resiliency. Frankl (1967) first proposed that having a purpose or sense of significance assists with increased stress management. In addition, according to Janoff-Bulman (1992), emotional disturbance may destroy a person's perception of drive; however, a resilient feeling of purposefulness before the emotional disturbance occurred could possibly increase resiliency. Based upon these findings, divorced women may have higher levels of resiliency if they had resilient emotions prior to the divorce.

According to van de Meer et al. (2018), resilience is a person's capacity to sustain a moderately steady and vigorous balance of mental and physical performance when faced with possible distressful experiences. People customarily come upon diverse demanding occurrences, and resilience encompasses handling those conditions or reverting to one's prior condition rapidly. As van de Meer et al. (2018) emphasized, people assess the possible danger of a problem and make a comparison to it with an evaluation of their ability to cope, to establish just how well they can deal with a condition. If a woman recognizes that she can handle a particular circumstance, she will be quick to recover, regardless of the condition's complications.

Simultaneously, people who distinguish as being powerless to handle a problem will simply surrender to difficulties. Divorced women experience a difficult phase of life. Evaluating their resilience helps to demonstrate if they have faith that they can hold up through the trials of post-divorce experiences and phases. In the researcher's experience as a mental health counselor, after divorce, women do, in fact, undergo a difficult period

and the evaluation of their resilience helps identify if they think that they are proficient to endure the challenges of pre- and post-divorce occurrences.

Process of Change and Transition in Divorce

Divorce can be traumatizing because there is a new life shift, lifestyle change, and financial change. Relationships with extended family on both sides may shift as well, causing some relationships to end as often family members were close to both divorced individuals as a couple (Kniskern, 2008). Merriam-Webster (2022a) defines *change* as altering, making different, or passing from one state to another. *Transition* is an evolution from one form, state, or style to another. According to Bridges' Model of Transition, there are three phases: endings, explorations, and new beginnings. Bridges (1991) stated that transition is necessary for change to occur. Those who become stuck in any of these three phases will not be capable of moving forward. A variety of emotions exist within the transition process (Kniskern, 2008; Wolfelt, 2008). The six transitions specified by Wolfelt (2008) are an excellent pattern for caregivers to follow when assisting clients in moving forward in their lives and finding fulfillment after divorce. Wolfelt's six transitions are: (a) Acknowledge the reality of the divorce, (b) Let yourself feel the pain of the divorce, (c) Shift your relationships with your former spouse, (d) Develop a new self-identity, (e) Search for meaning, and (f) Receive support from others.

Barriers to Mental Health Treatment by Demographic

African American/Black Women

Many African Americans are skeptical about using healthcare services because of the proposed procedures like the Tuskegee experiment (Rusert, 2009; Washington, 2007). Yick (2008) conducted a study of culturally diverse female domestic violence survivors.

The women used religion and spirituality to cope with abuse. Issues, such as limited access to healthcare, absence of health insurance, accessibility of service, and a lack of excellent medical care, impeded individuals from accessing mental health services and obtaining help (Ward et al., 2009). In addition to the barriers recognized, there is a lack of information or resources about where to look for mental health services, awkwardness about mental illness, accepted thinking about mental illness, prejudiced practices toward people diagnosed with a mental illness (Ward et al., 2009), and medical racism (Washington, 2007; Meghani et al., 2012; Nuriddin et al., 2020).

Hispanic Women

Primary care settings are often the entrance to recognizing mental health disorders for Hispanic women. American-born, Hispanic women are more likely to experience depression than Latin American Hispanics, and they are less likely to follow a treatment plan compared to non-Hispanic Whites (De Oliveira et al., 2017; Lopez et al., 2018). Barriers to Hispanic healthcare treatment include the cost of healthcare, family stigma, and culture (Lopez et al., 2018). In the researcher's professional experience as a mental health counselor, she has seen how healthcare costs and negative stigma within the family have caused problems for people of various races and cultures, including Hispanic women.

African American/Black and Hispanic Culture

Despite a decrease in legal marriages and increase in non-traditional unions, African American culture discourages divorce and splitting up the family. The Black community respects marriage institutions (Banks, 2011; Phillips et al., 2012; Vaterlaus et al., 2016). Hispanic families have traditional beliefs like African Americans; however,

family perspectives about marriage are based upon religious affiliation (Vaterlaus et al., 2016) and cultural values (Lamanna et al., 2018). Black and Hispanic people are subject to traumatizing lived experiences during the divorce process (Ellison et al., 2012) due to added racial and social norms, to which White people are not subjected. For women of color, post-divorce experiences have not disturbed their social lifestyles; Black women (specifically African Americans) usually have collective support from extended family, fictive kinship network supports, and the Black church, compared to Whites (Taylor et al., 2013); conversely, divorce has adversely disturbed the careers or professional existence of women of color (Lozano et al., 2021). According to Leopold (2018), it is highly probable that within the first two years of divorce, women will lose their jobs. For Black women as the most affected group, divorce impedes the accumulation of wealth over their lifetime (Addo & Lichter, 2013). Divorce among Black and Hispanic women has been attributed to intensified emotional collapse (De Oliveira et al., 2017).

African American Women Pre- and Post-Divorce Experiences

Divorces among African American women have radically increased over the years as compared to other races due to additional stressors (Sweeney & Raley, 2014). Out of every 1,000 African American married women, at least 30 divorces are reported (Phillips et al., 2012). By remaining single, Black women can reduce their uncertainty about the possibility of a future partner, maintain autonomy, and reduced gender inequity (Barros-Gomes & Baptist, 2014). Circumstances have been more problematic among African American women than Hispanic women because Black women are socialized around responsibilities that are not required of Black men. This variable sets up the marriage for miscommunication and lower levels of trust (Johnson & Loscocco, 2015).

In addition, there are greater dissimilarities among African American spouses than other groups (Clarkwest, 2007). Kia-Keating et al. (2016) postulated that this is based on adverse ways of thinking of how the family life should be among other races and the importance of the emphasis on family among women of color. Most African American women are marrying later in life because they are focused on education and careers (Ramos-Wada, 2013). Cultural differences among Black people are not highly dependent upon the insulated marital element; instead, there is a larger emphasis upon expanded family kinships (Brown, 2014). Hence, the total volume of married women in this grouping has remained considerably small when paralleled with the other cultures in the United States (Vaterlaus et al., 2015).

Social issues such as poverty, lower education, and joblessness affect African Americans and contribute to increased divorce (Barker et al., 1998; Hurt et al., 2013). Research reveals that over 99% of Black women who live to the age of 51 have been married at least one time (Weisenfeld, 2013). More Black women than White women do not stay married, but they take longer to get a divorce than their White counterparts. Blacks more often than White women choose to separate instead of formally divorcing (Sweeney & Phillips, 2004).

Research has shown that Black women face more emotional trauma as a result of a divorce more so than Whites, Asians, and other ethnic communities (Johnson & Loscocco, 2015). Because of poverty, Black women become homeless among other socio-economic challenges (Leopold, 2018). As a result, Black women become victims of stress-related disorders and anxiety (Lopez et al., 2018).

Hispanic Women Pre- and Post-Divorce Experiences

Even though Hispanic women divorce at a rate of 2.5% (18.5 per 1,000 people), unlike Whites, Black and Hispanic women are more likely to have trauma during a divorce (Ellison et al., 2012) due to additional societal and racial norms.

The most dominant religion for Hispanic women is Catholicism. Attitudes toward families, marriages, and divorces are dictated by the Catholic Church (Davenport, 2016; Perry & Whitehead, 2018). Because the Catholic Church is against divorce, numerous women are forced to remain in difficult marriages rather than endure emotional distress caused by disobeying the Church (Mullins, 2016).

Previous Research on Hispanic Women and Divorce

There is limited research on the divorce experiences of Hispanic women as compared to their White counterparts. As a mental health counselor, it has been the researcher's experience that societal challenges for both pre- and post-divorce Hispanic women enhance their emotional experiences. There are no known counseling therapies that specifically address these emotional challenges.

Spirituality, Religion, and Divorce

The definition of Christian spirituality, according to McGrath (2015), relates that there is a search for fulfillment and Christian existence that involves combining the basic ideas of Christianity and the complete experience of living and exhibiting a Christian faith. Living encounters with Jesus Christ are concerned with Christian life and demonstrate devotional practices that have been clearly developed with a relationship with Christ. The understanding of Christian spirituality relates to how people deepen their

relationships with God, or “practice the presence of God” (McGrath, 2015, p. 3). For this study, the focus was on Christian spirituality.

Christianity

According to McGrath (2015), Christianity has three key components. First, Christian values—regardless of the differing beliefs about the guidelines of Christianity—are fairly simple to demonstrate as a conventional foundation of convictions undergirding the distinct forms of Christianity. These are established in Christian statements of faith, which are recognized as declarations of belief from every major Christian house of worship. For Christians, these values have a major effect on how believers live their lives (McGrath, 2015).

Second is established principles. Christianity is based upon faith born out of ethics and has explicit values as the basis of the believer’s core framework in living his or her life. Christian values are principles based upon the belief in and the teachings of Jesus Christ. Jesus is regarded by Christians as both the life source of faith and the ultimate illustration of living in intimate communion with their Lord. Existence of a Spirit-filled life would reveal and exemplify Christ-like principles (McGrath, 2015).

Third is an approach to living. Christianity is about the way one lives life. The Christian lifestyle encompasses an outward behavior that exemplifies Christian beliefs and values. Faith distinctively influences believers’ daily lives. For example, Christian spiritual practices, such as attending a house of worship and praying to God, are patterns of behavior exemplifying a Christian existence (McGrath, 2015).

Styles of Christianity

Several factors shape Christianity; there is not one set of foundational beliefs (McGrath, 2015). Additionally, there are several divergent factors, such as theology, personal issues, denominational considerations, and attitudes toward the world, culture, and history (McGrath, 2015). These divergent factors have a powerful effect on how people practice their faith.

According to McGrath (2015), there are so many styles of Christianity that researchers would need to immerse themselves within each lived experience to understand them completely. For this study's purpose, the focus was on an overall view of Protestantism and Catholicism. These Christian, religious faiths have a strong presence among Blacks/African Americans and Hispanic in North America (Barnes et al., 2020).

Protestantism

Basic Beliefs. Protestant teaching finds its importance in corporate and personal Bible reading (McGrath, 2015). Some Catholic beliefs are deemed optional. Evangelical churches have become mainstream among Protestant churches, and evangelicals stress that Christians must be born again (McGrath, 2015), which places their focus on Jesus Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. Personal conversion also has high relevance. A profound dedication to worldwide evangelism is important to personal conversion (McGrath, 2015).

Views on Divorce. Blaming one another during the divorce and focusing on the faults in the other, rather than oneself, is likely depicted in Protestantism (Perry & Whitehead, 2018). Teachings such as Matthew 5:32–39 state that divorce is only permissible by adultery.

Catholicism

Fundamental Beliefs. Catholicism is the world's leading model of Christianity today (McGrath, 2015). The Catholic definition of spirituality is the daily disclosing of an elemental choice to develop or continue Christian practices (Reiser, 1994). The church is commonly viewed as a heavenly institution, founded on godly truth (McGrath, 2015). The Catholic Church is highly ceremonial, and the focus of the Church is vastly structured. The Catholic Church displays its beliefs by the evidence of its worship practices. Mass is the most important part of worship due to the sacrament of Eucharist, which represents the body and blood of Christ.

Views on Divorce. Marriages in the Catholic church are viewed as permanent unions, and therefore it is a sin to remarry after a divorce. An annulment makes it possible for divorced Catholics to remarry and take communion (Fahmy, 2018; Lipka, 2015).

Research on Black/African American and Hispanic Christian Beliefs

Research has shown a considerable association between religious conviction and wellbeing (Ellison et al., 2010). Religion has been an important part of the lives of women of color (Alim et al., 2008; Fincham & Beach, 2013). African American and Hispanic women in general believe in Christianity and spirituality (Fincham & Beach, 2013). According to Abrams et al. (2014), the largest group of religious people in the United States is African American. The custom has been held due to a historical period of past occurrences (Taylor et al., 2000). Debnam et al. (2011) investigated the societal dynamics that have, throughout generations, influenced women of color to be more active in spiritual matters. Research has shown that for African Americans, committed

engagement in a spiritual community is more beneficial with lower-brand emotional support than conventional counseling services (Alim et al., 2008).

Research has shown that African Americans as a minority group experienced more discrimination than any other minority in the U.S. (Davenport, 2016). Thus, religion is perceived as a way of life and used as a tool of adjusting to the social injustices subjected to the group (Center for African American Ministries Black Church Studies, 2017). Therefore, over 80% of African American women are religious with more than 70% attending weekly services (DeFrietas, 2019). The most dominant denomination practiced by Hispanic women is Catholicism (Mattis & Grayman-Simpson, 2013). As such, Hispanic women's approach concerning family life, marital union, and legal marital separation are delineated by Catholic Church instruction (Perry & Whitehead, 2018).

Christianity and spiritualism provide a new hope among Black and Hispanic women, thereby allowing these two groups of women to feel empowered over their circumstances (Bauer et al., 2017; Caldwell et al., 1992). Beach et al. (2011) and Swidler (1986) recognized the custom due to the emotive healing offered in the majority of Christian education. The Bible is the center from which the majority of Christian education is derived. The Bible instructs about *agape* love and that God has all power over what human beings experience. Distressed persons discover that they effortlessly convey their emotional pain and pursue support from their church pastor, Christian spiritual leaders, or church members (Calhoun-Brown, 1999; Fincham et al., 2011; Taylor et al., 2000). Those who choose to participate in Christian spirituality are more prepared to confront and prevail over their circumstances (Brown, 2014; Ellison, et al., 2011; Foner & Alba, 2008).

Research Aim

This study aimed to determine a direct association between the type of emotional response and the nature of the experience that triggers the reaction. The study's purpose was to show that African American/Black and Hispanic/Latino women's emotional responses to divorce depended on other individual factors, such as coping with emotions and the emotional investment they had in the marriage relationship, which was broken by the traumatic experience of divorce. The study investigated the influence of Christianity on these women's lives and how their religious beliefs affected their emotional responses to both pre- and post-divorce experiences and to what extent their faith assisted them with higher levels of resiliency.

This study analyzed the relationship between adverse experiences and emotional behaviors using the transcendental phenomenology method, which was chosen because of the focus on the lived experience and the essence of these experiences. Second, according to Moustakas (1994), transcendental phenomenology and analysis were adopted in order to use systematic and rigorous procedures.

The study also utilized secondary resources and data. The study reviewed articles, dissertations, and research conducted between 2010 and 2018 on the same topics to obtain relevant results; the preliminary studies were completed using the World Health Organization database. Further, the study was conducted on other databases like PUBMED, Angeline, and other sites. The keywords were *emotional expressions and negative experiences, African American, Black, Hispanic, Women, Pre-divorce, Post-divorce, Christian Spirituality, Grief, Coping, Resilience, Wheel of Life, Hope, Phenomenological, and Transcendental* (Campbell-Sills et al., 2006; Creswell, 2003).

Research Gap

There is limited research on pre- and post-divorce effects on African American and Hispanic women and Christian spirituality in counseling versus their White counterparts. Experience as a mental health professional has shown that societal challenges enhance the negative emotional experiences that African American and Hispanic women have before and after divorce, with no specific counseling therapies to address these emotional challenges.

Conclusion

Chapter 2 provided an overview of the literature concerning divorce; specifically, divorce as it relates to African American/Black and Hispanic women. Also included were the main objective of the thesis, the need for exploring the emotional impact on this group of women, the role of the mental health professional, barriers to treatment, and historical relevance to Christian spirituality to assist with their coping skills through adversity. Chapter 3 discusses the research methodology.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This study investigated the lived experiences of African American/Black and Hispanic women post-divorce in Texas. The research showed a direct association between the type of emotional response and the nature of the experience that triggered the reaction; the traumatic experience of divorce broke their emotional investment in the marriage relationship. The study investigated the influence of Christianity on these women's lives and how their religious beliefs affected their emotional response to pre- and post-divorce experiences and assisted them with higher levels of resiliency.

Research Question

The research question was as follows: What is the lived experience of divorced Black and Hispanic Christian women?

Research Design

Philosophy and Framework

The researcher selected a qualitative research approach which comprised a cross-sectional design because the research entailed examining the divorced women's experience pre- and post-divorce at a single point in time. The method used was the phenomenological research method. The researcher used inductive reasoning as an observation tool to develop a generalized understanding of these women's lived experiences. The researcher neither confirmed nor denied anything about the experiences of these women in comparison to others; rather, the research focused on exploring their lived experiences with divorce.

Qualitative Research Definition

Qualitative research begins with interpretative/theoretical frameworks that inform the study of research problems addressing the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. The researcher must study the situation, and qualitative researchers use an emerging qualitative approach to inquiry. Data analysis is both inductive and deductive and establishes patterns and themes. The final written report or presentation includes the voices of participants, the reflexivity of the researcher, a complex description and interpretation of the problem and its contribution to the literature, and a call for change (Creswell, 2013; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Qualitative research is a positioned endeavor that pinpoints the deficiency of an area and comprises an established, informative, informational system that makes a domain evident. In addition, qualitative research may include field reports, dialogues, question-and-answer sessions, pictures, footages, and self-notes. Qualitative researchers investigate mechanisms in their native environments, attempting to make meaning or to clarify experiences in terms of the values people generate (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

Researchers using qualitative method search for the participants' meaning to the problem while not utilizing the researcher's own preconceived notions about the problem. The researcher must approach the study with a curiosity to learn about the participants' experiences. The participants have various perspectives and insights into the problem; therefore, there should be several themes created through the research design. The researcher obtains collaboration with participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Additionally, the design in qualitative research may evolve because the goal is to identify the problem from each participant's standpoint; therefore, different processes may change during

research, including the interview questions and data collection procedures (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Qualitative research is best utilized when there is a problem or situation to be explored that cannot be done without understanding the context of a person's total experience with the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The story needs to unfold in a manner that allows for flexibility in language reporting, but which cannot be done using other means, such as through a quantitative methodology (Aspers & Corte, 2019). Qualitative research is used to create and verify theories or to justify qualitative methods (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Qualitative research takes up a large space within social research today with highly relevant topics such as "gender, culture, and marginalized groups" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 68). There are different forms of qualitative inquiry. These include grounded theory (i.e., the researcher consistently compares data for differences and similarities among different groups), case study (e.g., exploring in-depth, over a period of time, persons, situations, groups, or processes), narrative (i.e., using interviews and stories chronologized in a collaborative narrative), ethnography (i.e., studying the lived experience of a specific group in the field), and phenomenology (i.e., identifying lived experiences of participants with identifying procedures and methods; Aspers & Corte, 2019; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Finally, qualitative research was chosen to best reflect the lived experiences of the participants since this approach allows for data using text, flexibility through open-ended questions, and participant collaboration to create meaning.

Phenomenology

Phenomenology, according to Kolkelmans (1967), is a term that has been used since 1765. It is a “philosophy [used] occasionally in Kant’s writings, but only with Hegel was a well-defined technical meaning constructed” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 26). Hegel also identified phenomenology as facts emerging to awareness (Moustakas, 1994). The word *phenomenon* comes from the Greek word *phaenesthai*, meaning to display a situation. Broadly, phenomenology brings awareness to an encounter and multiplies awareness. Phenomena are the developing modules of human scholarship and the foundation for all wisdom (Moustakas, 1994).

Any phenomenon can be the start of an investigation. Husserl was interested in making sense, unearthing the values and real substance of information (Moustakas, 1994). The transformation of an individual is derived through what Husserl calls “ideation” (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Kolkelmans, 1967, p. 80). Phenomenology, at every step, attempts to disseminate any prior judgments and has willingness to look into a fresh lens. It is unencumbered by traditions, attitudes, prejudgments of common knowledge, routines of nature, or knowledge not based upon distinct capabilities (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Phenomenological research is ingrained to learn the lived experiences of the research participants. According to Peoples (2021), meaning-making is vital to the investigator using phenomenological review. When the researcher asks different persons about their lived experiences, a question is presented to find the answer to “What is it like to undergo a certain occurrence?” Phenomenological questions do not include “opinions, perceptions, perspectives, or any other thought on the topic” (Peoples, 2021, p. 4).

Feelings and perceptions of research participants are different. Participants can discuss both their feelings and perceptions. Lived-experience discussions provide readers with an understanding of what an experience is like. Both discussing feelings and discussing experiences as lived are acceptable in phenomenological research. The researcher must consistently make this distinction throughout the research process. Data analysis in phenomenological study assists in providing a meaningful reality.

“Phenomenological researchers pause and look at a phenomenon as the lived experience of some activity and illuminate its specific characteristic as an experience rather than trying to turn it into an abstract structure and comparing it to other structures” (Peoples, 2021, p. 5).

Phenomenological researchers may include their own lived experiences with the research. The research is not a hypothesis but is both objective and subjective. Phenomenology is not an inflexible technique without room for change as each participant’s experience of the phenomenon is personal and varies. Each individual describes the phenomena as they experience them.

Phenomenology points at achieving a greater comprehension of the disposition or sense of ordinary experience; it does not offer the opportunity of effective theory with which to explain and/or control the world, but rather it offers the possibility of perceptions that bring in more straight interaction with a domain (Vagle, 2018; van Manen, 1990).

When studying a phenomenon, there is “intentionality,” which means indivisible attachments linking human beings and foci (Vagle, 2018). Intentionality is the awareness of an inner knowledge of the existence to some degree (Moustakas, 1994). The

knowledge of intentionality requires individuals to be aware of themselves inside and out (Moustakas, 1994). People may be connected to one another, situations, or past times in diverse ways (Vagle, 2018). These connections may manifest varying emotions to individuals, such as hopelessness, confusion, sadness, anger, or relief.

Every intentional act is noetic; it is vital to having meaning (Moustakas, 1994). Intentional acts have both *noema* and *noesis*. The noema is the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). According to Moustakas (1994), some of the challenges to intentions are: (a) Clarifying the sense in which experiences are directed; (b) Discerning the features of consciousness that are essential for the individuation of objects (real or imagery) in consciousness (noema); (c) Explicating how beliefs about such objects (real or imaginary) may be acquired, how it is that one experiences what one experiences (noesis; Miller, 1984; Moustakas, 1994); and (d) Integrating the noematic and noetic correlates of intentionality into meanings and essences of experiences (Moustakas, 1994).

Intuition is another key concept in transcendental phenomenology. The self is the “intuitive-thinking” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 42) part of the being. It is the first part of human understanding. Intuition is not impressionistic; rather, it is a natural attitude from which information derives that is a combination of perception and thought (Moustakas, 1994).

Husserl developed the concept of *epoché*, which is “the elimination of suppositions and the raising of knowledge above every possible doubt” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 36). *Epoché* is a Greek word meaning to cease from making a preconceived decision (Moustakas, 1994). The first step with transcendental phenomenology is *epoché*. The next step is transcendental-phenomenological reduction. Each experience is

considered in its uniqueness and on its own (Moustakas, 1994). Textural explanations of the meanings and essences of the phenomenon are provided through transcendental-phenomenological reduction (Moustakas, 1994) The information that is derived from the experience is dependent upon the person and the subject (Moustakas, 1994).

Types of Phenomenology

Hermeneutical Phenomenology. Developed by van Manen (1990), hermeneutical phenomenology is the:

Study of lived experience, explication of phenomena as they present themselves to consciousness, the study of essences, the description of experiential meaning we live as we live them, the attentive practice of thoughtfulness, a search for what it means to be human and a poeticizing activity. (p. 8)

This method does not have a structured research strategy, as there are no set of rules to follow (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Moustakas's (1994) Transcendental Phenomenological Method. Moustakas's focus is on how the participant describes the personal experience. The researcher identifies the essence of human experiences concerning a phenomenon as described by participants in the study. Understanding the lived experiences of the research participants involves studying a small number of subjects through extensive and prolonged engagement in order to develop patterns and relationships of meaning (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). As a part of this process, the researcher brackets personal experiences to assist in reducing researcher bias and gain greater understanding of participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

A qualitative study using Moustakas's Modified Van Kamp Phenomenological Approach was used because the research study used small sample size of 10-15 women, and qualitative researchers use small experiment sample quantities (Gentiles et al., 2015). In addition, Moustakas's Modified Van Kamp Phenomenological method has been proven to work well with researching the lived experience.

The ideal sample size is difficult to predetermine; however, Creswell and Poth (2018) recommend a sample size between "3 to 4 individuals to 10 to 15" individuals (p. 76). This study primarily relied on primary data and reviewed secondary data. Based upon the research design used for this study, preliminary data were collected from ten post-divorce African American and Hispanic women aged 33–57 years old living in Texas. These women can be described as professional, working-class, or homemakers, and all were in heterosexual marriage relationships.

Regarding the secondary data, the researcher considered the latest insights from academic sources and women's local and international agencies advocating for women's welfare. Some of the resources used included WHO databases, medical databases such as PUBMED, and psychology databases such as APA PsychInfo, the *British Journal of Medicine*, AgeLine, and APA Handbooks of Psychology. The researcher considered utilizing current and past questionnaires available on the topic of interest and peer-reviewed information on the subject of interest.

The participants had to meet the researcher's qualifying standards (Creswell & Poth, 2018), which were: (a) Black/African American or Hispanic females, (b) working-class or homemakers, (c) professionals, (d) either pre-divorced or post-divorced, (e) Christian or Catholic, and (f) Texas residents.

Snowball sampling was used in addition to criterion sampling to identify cases of significance from people who know others who are familiar with situations that have valuable information (Creswell & Poth, 2018). “Saturation is achieved when new information obtained does not provide further insight into the category” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 203).

Role of the Researcher

Before the study, researcher bias was assessed using *epoché*. In this process, the researcher bracketed personal encounters, put away preconceptions, and started the research question and answer session with impartial, responsive attentiveness (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher obtained a Master of Science in Marriage and Family Counseling from Our Lady of the Lake University, earning her degree while using a post-modernist approach. “Post-modern suppositions primarily emphasize the social or relational creation or embeddedness of reality, for example, meanings, patterns, diagnostic categories and stories are the by-products of human relationships and communicative interactions” (Anderson, 1997, p. 27). In using a constructivist approach, reality represents an individual, purposeful version: individuals, as facing subjects of humankind, create and decipher truth (Anderson, 1997).

All interactions and perceptions are interpretative creations of each person’s experience and are solely an arrangement and organization of a realm comprised by one’s personal knowledge (Anderson, 1997). Meaning is not known with certainty but is produced as individuals stay in dialogue with an unpredictable outcome during the conversation while making a commitment to “trust and believe, ask conversational

questions, listen and respond, maintain coherence, stay in sync and honor a client's story" (Anderson, 1997, p. 140).

The not-knowing approach to inquiry involves having a collaborative stance, connection, and humility. Interest is more on what "a client has to say, than in pursuing, telling, validating or promoting his or her own knowledge or preoccupations" (Anderson, 1997, p. 136). Using a not-knowing approach to inquiry has been the type of approach the researcher used in a therapist role along with other theories in counseling clients. Since this has been seen as effective and applicable, a constructivist approach was used as a system of inquiry with the participants in this study.

Data Collection and Instrumentation

Interview Questions (Appendix A)

Peoples (2021) suggested using a semi-structured interview because this type of interview allows the researcher to develop pertinent interview questions applicable to the research question. In this manner, crucial facets of the research study are included while allowing participants to share additional material that may have been significant to the study. The research question was subsequently formulated according to Moustakas's (1994) recommendation: What are the lived experiences of divorce for Black and Hispanic Christian women and in what context did they experience them?

Data Collection

Data collection was conducted by the researcher using a demographic questionnaire and semi-structured, 45- to 60-minute interviews. The interviews were conducted by telephone due to health and safety measures during COVID-19 restrictions and were transcribed by the researcher using audio transcription software to obtain

information on the participants' lived experiences. The researcher led the private one-on-one interviews with participants.

The researcher requested voluntary participation in the study and participants were explained the benefits and risks of study participation. Participants were allowed to ask questions and provide comments regarding the study and were free to withdraw their consent and discontinue their participation in the project, without penalty, at any time. Participants signed their consent (Appendix B) for study and also a release to audio record the interviews. For this study, the conceptional framework and research interview questions were developed based on the Wheel of Life Model, referencing positive psychology, which is different from Buddhist concepts as explained below.

Initially, the history of the Wheel of Life is a symbolic representation of a repeated reality found on the outside walls of Tibetan Buddhist temples and monasteries in the Indo-Tibetan region. The Wheel of Life is a pictorial diagram which presents basic Buddhist concepts in a manner that can be understood by unschooled and untrained individuals (Sopa, 1984). Examples of Buddhist concepts include obtaining enlightenment and nirvana, a higher level of happiness. The central goal for preserving the teaching is having a graphic presentation that can be well-maintained for every generation. Looking at graphics is useful for teaching and preserving important Buddhist teachings and information (Lamirin, 2021).

In addition, the Wheel of Life has evolved under several categories in psychology and life management, including weight management (Anderson, 2016), work stress (Byrne, 2005), and positive psychology. Most notably, a Christian named Paul Meyer created the Wheel of Life in the 1960s to assist people in achieving their goals. As a

business owner of the Success Motivation Institute, Meyer gained widespread notoriety for being the “pioneer of the personal development industry” (Meyer, n.d., para. 1). The Wheel of Life Model is common in treatment protocols, for example, to assist women in counseling who have experienced sexual trauma or abuse, such as the power and control wheel for domestic violence, and, most notably, in women’s shelters and in treatment of alcohol and addiction (e.g., Mindfulness Based Relapse Prevention [MBRP]; Groves, 2014).

The Wheel of Life, based on positive psychology, is useful for change as it identifies six to eight areas of an individual’s life, including health, career, spiritual, relationships (including relationship to self), finances, hobbies, personal growth, and environment. Assessing these areas helps to determine how balanced one’s life is. The Wheel of Life construct is present in different spiritual and pious cultures (Byrne, 2005). Therefore, it has almost boundless ways in which it can be used; in particular, to assess life balance (Byrne, 2005).

At all times, it is conceivable to add or take out groupings, or, for instance, to divide the category of family unit and friends into two (Mulder, 2017). Therefore, the Wheel of Life tool was used as a guide to the development of interview questions for the study participants regarding identification of their lived experiences pre- and post-divorce, determination of how Christianity assisted them in resiliency, and discovery of how grief was assessed through emotions using six of the eight components. The Wheel of Life is flexible in its use and elements can be interchanged based upon what is needed; therefore, all eight components of the wheel are not necessarily used in every situation

(see Appendix A for interview questions related to the Wheel of Life components). The eight components of the wheel of life are as follows, related to interview questions:

1. *Emotional health*: How did you experience emotions due to the divorce?
2. *Physical health*: How did your divorce experience impact your physical health?
3. *Career*: How has the divorce affected your work?
4. *Finance*: How were your finances affected by divorce?
5. *Relationships*: How are your relationships with friends, coworkers, and church members impacted by the divorce experience? If affected, was it more before or after the divorce?
6. *Intellectual pursuits/hobbies*: Did you use hobbies or volunteering to assist you in adjusting to your new life after divorce? If so, what was your experience?
7. *Life goals*: How did you choose to create new life goals after the divorce?
8. *Spiritual development/Christian spirituality*: How did your Christian spirituality affect the grief process during and after the divorce?

Recordings were transcribed by hand and also using a professional transcription service.

The transcriptions were compared for accuracy and sent to the participants for fact-checking.

Data Analysis and Data Management

Data analysis involved transcribing interview responses, coding, and identifying common themes. Pseudonyms were used to protect participant identities. Initial coding was done by hand and then reviewed, and final coding used Dedoose software. Specific

procedures for analysis followed Moustakas's (1994) Modified Van Kamp Analysis.

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), Moustakas's Modified Van Kamp Analysis of Phenomenological Data Method steps involve:

1. Listing and preliminary grouping: List every expression relevant to the experience (horizontalization; see complete list of open coding in Appendix C).
2. Reduction and elimination: To determine the invariant constituents, test each expression for two requirements. (Complete listing of initial open coding in Appendix D and Appendix E; notes for the reduction and elimination processes can be found in Appendix F).
 - a. Does it contain a moment of the experience that is a necessary and sufficient constituent for understanding it?
 - b. Is it possible to abstract and label it? If so, it is a horizon of the experience.

Expressions not meeting the above requirements are eliminated. Overlapping, repetitive, and vague expressions are also eliminated or presented in more exact, descriptive terms. The horizons that remain are invariant constituents of the experience.
3. Clustering and thematizing the invariant constituents: Cluster the invariant constituents of the experience that are related into a thematic label. The clustered and labeled constituents are the core themes of the experiences.
4. Final identification of the invariant constituents and themes by application: Validation.
5. Check the invariant constituents and their accompanying themes against the complete record of the research participant.

- a. Are they expressed explicitly in the complete transcription?
 - b. Are they compatible if not explicitly expressed? (If they are not explicit or compatible, they are not relevant to the co-researcher's experience and should be deleted.)
 - c. Using the relevant validated invariant constituents and themes, construct for each co-researcher an individual textural description of the experience.

Include verbatim examples from the transcribed interview.
6. Construct for each co-researcher an Individual Structural Description of the experience based on the Individual Textural Description and Imaginative Variation.
 7. Construct for each research participant a Textural-Structural Description of the meanings and essences of the experience, incorporating the invariant constituents and themes.
 8. From the individual textural-structured descriptions of all co-researchers' experiences, construct *a composite textural-structural description of the meanings and essences of the experience* integrating all individual textural-structural descriptions into a universal description of the experience representing the group as a whole (Moustakas, 1994, p. 121).

The researcher reviewed each transcribed interview "regarding every horizon or statement relevant to topic and question as having equal value" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 119). Further, the researcher read transcribed statements several times, which brought increased awareness of the participants' experiences (Moustakas, 1994).

Each horizon was analyzed according to Moustakas (1994). First was the reduction and elimination step, removing information that was not relevant or was overlapping or repetitive. Next, the researcher clustered and created themes from the invariant constituents because “clustered and labeled constituents are the core themes of the experience” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 121). The researcher compared the invariant constituents to the original interview transcripts and notes to validate the invariant constituents (Moustakas, 1994).

The themes were verified by the researcher as being expressed explicitly in the transcripts. First, themes were considered compatible if they were not explicitly expressed and deleted if not compatible to the researcher’s experience (Moustakas, 1994). Second, textual descriptions of each participant’s experience based upon the Individual Textural Description and Imaginative Variation were developed (Moustakas, 1994). Third, a textural-structured description of the meaning and essences of the experience was constructed, incorporating the invariant constituents and themes (Moustakas, 1994). Finally, a combined textural-structured narrative of the connotations and essence of the lived experiences was derived from the distinct textural-structured depictions of every participant’s encounters, creating a collective narrative of the experience that embodied the entire group (Moustakas, 1994).

Data were stored in password-protected software in Dedoose, which will be kept on a secure hard drive for up to three years and is USB protected. No identifying information was included in the transcripts. Further confidentiality was maintained by placing a code number instead of personally identifying information in the resulting data

files. Those who participated in the study were tracked, but this information remained confidential so which participant produced which data file cannot be known.

Validation Methods

The study was validated via the following: (a) obtaining rich, thick data, (b) member checking, (d) clarifying research bias (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher reviewed every expression from the participants' transcriptions several times. Safe language was used with clients in that all interviews were conducted in a manner that allowed clients' clarification and understanding of questions. Clients were notified that they were free to leave the study at any point in the research process without penalty.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations involved obtaining ethical clearance from HGST's specialization director as well as the project director of the Doctor of Professional Counseling Program. Additionally, demographic information was used only with pseudonyms for participants. The researcher's knowledge of the participants was only needed to contact them.

Consent forms given to the participants included the project description, the research criteria, procedures, benefits, and risks. Additionally, clarification was provided for the following topics: voluntary participation, data collection, confidentiality of records, and participant rights. Participants gave written consent to take part in the research study, to audio record the research project, and to the transcription of findings for the research project.

Limitations

Limitations were involved in the study. Phone interviews limited engagement with the client's experience in that the researcher was unable to obtain facial or other physical cues from participants or to gauge their experiences. Richness of data was lost in the design choice. To mitigate data loss, questions were simplified, neutrality phrased, and continuous clarification ensured.

The results of the research were not generalizable beyond the specific population of Christian, African American/Black and Hispanic women in Texas because qualitative research was done with a specific population; this was a limited geographic location. Additional limitations were that recording was needed due to COVID-19 for the safety and welfare of the researcher and participants.

Personal experience with divorce could have been a limitation, but it was found that using the collaborative, not-knowing approach assisted with reducing or eliminating researcher bias in the interviewing and data analysis process. Obtaining more participants for the study may have reached different results.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Moustakas's (1994) phenomenological, qualitative, Van Kamp-style methodology was chosen as the most effective method to explore the lived experience of African American/Black and Hispanic women. The participants of the study met the requirement criteria as African American/Black and Hispanic women, post-divorce, in Texas, who held Christian beliefs, who were previously in heterosexual relationships, and who could be characterized as professional, working-class, or homemaker. Ten women was an appropriate number for sample size. The interviews were

conducted by telephone for physical safety due to COVID-19 restrictions. Ethical considerations for the study followed AAMFT, APA, and ACA guidelines and ethical standards for HGST. Data were collected, analyzed, and coded into themes to address the research questions using validity and reliability methods. The findings are discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4: Results

Chapter 4 of this study presents results of the qualitative, phenomenological research analysis involving interviews with ten Black and Hispanic, divorced, Christian women. The purpose of this study was to investigate the lived experience of Black and Hispanic Christian women post-divorce. Dedoose's qualitative data analysis software was used to assist the researcher in coding, organizing, and tabulating the themes. This chapter contains the demographics, data analysis, findings of this study, and summary.

Demographics

Eight Black and two Hispanic, divorced, Christian women were interviewed for this study. The study criteria were African American/Black and Hispanic women with Christian beliefs, between 33–57 years old, post-divorce, residing in Texas. Table 1 shows the participants' demographic information.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Participant	Race/ Ethnicity	Age	Education	Children	Years Married	Years Divorced	How Met Spouse
Kim	Black	46	Bachelor's	1	18	3	Beach
Juno	Hispanic	41	Bachelor's	0	4	10	Family
Tina 1	Black	51	Master's	2	10	15	High School
Sandy	Hispanic	38	Associate's	2	16	1	Chat Room
Nikki	Black	41	Master's	3	5	9	Online
Pretty	Black	57	Some College	1	10	5	Work
Lorraine	Black	45	Bachelor's	1	5	17	College
Tina 2	Black	37	Some College	1	13	1 month	Entertainment
Phoenix	Black	33	Master's	0	7	7	Work
Storm	Black	50	Bachelor's	2	13	15	Mutual Friend

Data Analysis

Table 2 reveals analysis of the data according to themes and findings with explanations from participants in the section labeled Findings. Table 3 includes a listing of themes that surfaced.

Table 2

Primary and Secondary Codes

Primary Code	Secondary Codes	Number of Participants	Theme/Subthemes	Definition of Theme
Health	Emotional	7	Health/Emotional Health	Health: How emotionally and physically healthy you are. Physical discomforts; including appearance and weight
	Physical	4	Physical Health	
Relationships	Children	5	(Note: 2 participants did not have children; children are considered family members but not family of origin)	Relationships: Friends and coworkers, family, unconditional whether trustworthy or not
	Ex-spouse	3	Relationship with Self	
	Family of Origin	4	Relationship with Family Members	Family Members: Ex-spouse, family of origin, children, in-laws
	In-Law	3		
	Self	10		Church relationships: Church members and Pastor within the Christian church building where a person worships
	Friends and Coworkers	5	Relationships with Friends and Coworkers	
	Church Members and Pastor	6	Relationships with Church	
Spirituality	Faith and Prayer	5	Faith and Prayer	Spirituality: Spiritually connected to the inner and outer world
	Relationship with God	4	Relationship with God	
	Strong Personal Relationship	4	Strong Personal Relationship due to Relationship with God or Divorce Experience	

Finances	More vs Less Money	10	More v Less Money	Finances: Enough money to meet your personal needs
	Increased Work	4	Increased Work Which Created More Money	
New Life Goals	Personal Development/ Professional Development	9	Personal Development Professional Development	New Life Goals: Personal development and professional development
	Contribution to Society	5	Increased Contribution to Society as a Result of Personal and Professional Development	Personal Development: Increased love for self and desire to identify what they want to fulfill Professional Development: Continued education, professional advancement Contribution to Society as a result personal development and/or professional development

Table 3

List of Themes

Health	Relationships	Spirituality	Finances	New Life Goals
(a) Emotional (b) Physical	(a) Family Members (1) Children (2) Ex-spouse (3) Family of Origin (4) In-Laws (b) Self (c) Friends & Coworkers (d) Relationship with their church (1) Church members (2) Pastor	(a) Faith and Prayer (b) Relationship with God (c) Strong Personal Relationship	(a) More vs Less Money (b) Increased Work	(a) Personal development (b) Professional Development (c) Contributions to Society

Findings

As shown in Table 3, five themes emerged using Moustakas's (1994) Van Kamp methodology: (a) health, (b) relationships, (c) spirituality, (d) finances, and (e) new life goals. The subthemes developed out of each theme are included within the description of each theme below.

Theme 1: Health

Positive psychology promotes wellness as vital to people capable of having the life they need for maximum coping to include mind, body, and spirit (Mayer, et al., 2020). Health is defined as both emotional and physical wellness. In the context of this study, emotional health involved the self-management of one's emotions in healthy ways (Mayer, et al., 2020). Physical health entails diet, exercise, and medical health (Mayer, et al., 2020).

Emotional Health. Participants spoke of experiencing grief emotions prior to a divorce, involving anger, disbelief, depression, and sadness, with anger being the strongest emotion. The role of spirituality helped some with their grief but not others. Physically, the participants were not as affected but when they were, it was due to the emotional feelings of loss during the divorce experience.

One participant, identified as Tina 2, spoke about how she identifies as being a Christian and falling more emotionally into grief because of her belief:

The more I thought about how I was supposed to be a Christian, and what I was going through, the more I fell into grief or deeper into depression because

Christians are not supposed to get divorced. I never saw myself getting divorced; I

never entertained it. I thought I'd be married to my ex forever. It's not something that I wanted in the beginning. I was very sad and just disheartened.

Tina 2 felt depressed and in disbelief that she was divorced. These emotions caused her to feel sad because her Christian beliefs were that Christians should be committed to keeping the family together and not divorcing. Similarly, Tina 1 experienced the same emotional response—disbelief that she was having to go through a divorce. Tina 1 initially physically isolated due to depressed emotions surrounding her divorce. Tina 1 said:

Initially, I kind of shut down. I went through, I'm going to say, a depression. When I say that, here's what I mean. I just stayed in my room for a while, lights out, didn't do much, didn't talk much. And when I slowly came out of it, I did interact with people, but it was very minimal. I was almost mute. I didn't really talk. I didn't do nothing. I stayed in my room with the lights out. I went places that I had to go to. So, I had to go to work sometimes.... Initially, this is initially. Because after, I guess, maybe the first six months, I was pretty much okay. I was back to being interactive. But I would stay in my room. Go to work, come home. It was kind of routine and robotic.

In comparison, Kim felt more emotional response than physical response from the divorce, due to her idea that family is to be together always. Kim said:

Well, initially when I walked out of the courtroom.... Well actually, while I was in the courtroom I cried while I read the statement, because there's a statement that you can read to the judge. And I actually cried, and it was not because of losing him, those tears were more of the loss of what I thought should have been, the

loss of family and it being final. Family should be loyal, happy, communicative, forever.

There were more emotional responses to the divorce than physical responses to the divorce. Examples of this were from Lorraine and Pretty. Each felt similar emotions as Tina 2, Tina 1, and Kim. These participants described feeling sadness due to the ending of their marriage. Surprise and anger were the greatest emotions because each of the participants had been married for long periods of time and did not expect or want their marriages to end in divorce. Lorraine displayed several grief emotions, including anger and disbelief because she had already been through many disappointments in the marriage before it ended. Lorraine said, “A lot of emotions, sadness, anger, disbelief; of course, the disbelief is just I can’t believe that all I’ve been through that this is where I am now.”

In addition, Pretty felt “devastated”; however, her Christian faith held her from self-harm and physically harming her ex-spouse. Pretty expressed:

It was an issue because it took me by surprise. I must say it was very devastating at first, but I am one of those people that bounce back quickly because of my faith. But I can tell that, as I said, one of the first issues [was that] I wanted to kill him because I had no idea my marriage was even heading towards divorce. I actually went to celebrate my 10-year anniversary and, on the return of celebrating my 10-year anniversary, I came back from out of town, and I was told he really didn’t want to be married anymore, at least not to me.

Pretty continued:

Anger at first, a lot of anger, hurt, disappointment after that. And, for myself, because of the anger and the hurt, me personally, I had to go see a counselor because of the anger and the hurt. But once I began to [see that] everything happens for a reason, and again because of my faith, I began to look to the hills, [from] which cometh my help; my help comes from God. I began to quickly put things behind me and moving forward, I challenged myself to do better for me. And that's what I did. The end result, life is amazing. I am truly enjoying life.

Storm and Sandy both felt the anger emotion as well, but each for different reasons. Storm was angry due to the manner in which her divorce was occurring, and Sandy experienced more worried feelings than anger, because she was concerned about a failing relationship she had started prior to divorce. Sandy felt her marriage was over due to her husband's infidelity in their marriage, similar to Storm. Storm stated:

Anger is probably the most prevalent one. My divorce was in part due to infidelity. My ex-husband was continuing to have a relationship with the woman that he was seeing when we were married. Anger was a huge part of my emotions when we separated. Again, a lot of crying, a lot of anger. Probably angry. That's probably the strongest emotion I felt afterwards.

In comparison to Storm, Sandy had another relationship that caused her additional distress. For example, Sandy said:

It mainly was a lot of fear, a lot of anxiety. I will also include . . . that, in a way, I don't want to call it a mistake, but I took it upon myself to start another

relationship in the midst of my divorce, and it added a lot more stress and anxiety to my divorce process.

Regarding emotional health, anger was the most prevalent emotion seen in most of the participants in their initial divorce experience. The second-highest emotion was disbelief that the marriage had ended. These emotional responses did impact some of the participants' physical health for the period during which they were feeling stress from the divorce experience.

Physical Health. Participants discussed their physical health as initially feeling, at times, physically ill due to increased stress emotions from the divorce experience, while for others there was no impact. Phoenix was physically ill due to not sleeping and not eating well, and, as a result, lost weight. She also experienced alopecia from the emotional stress from the divorce. Phoenix said:

I wasn't sleeping well. I wasn't eating well. I lost a lot of weight because I believe I was . . . stressed. I lost a lot of weight. I lost a lot of weight physically, and my stomach was hurting really heavy in the beginning [from] stress, I started losing hair, physically. I think it was because I feel like it triggered some type of alopecia in my head, so I started losing hair.

Phoenix felt physically ill due to the stress emotions she experienced from her divorce; however, Storm did not experience the same physical response as Phoenix. She did eat emotionally but did not report very much weight loss. Juno, similarly, lost weight due to the divorce experience like Phoenix. Storm did not feel the same physical illness as Phoenix. She described having a minimum amount of weight loss, whereas Juno expected to lose weight. Storm expressed:

I wouldn't say that it had a real effect on me physically. If anything, I may have gained weight from emotional eating, but it wasn't a huge amount of weight. I don't think it really had a real effect on me, physically.

Both Tina 1 and Nikki experienced physical symptoms due to their emotional stress feelings during the divorce. For example, Tina 1 was not hungry and not eating and Nikki had low energy from stress and was on anxiety medication. Tina 1 said, "I wasn't eating," and Nikki said:

It was just I was tired all the time. I mean, I didn't really gain any weight, but I think I put myself . . . I was just stressed out. I ended up getting on anxiety medication because I just couldn't focus at work.

Unlike Phoenix, Storm, Tina 1, and Nikki, Juno accepted weight loss as a part of her divorce experience. For example, Juno said, "I mean, the usual, lost a lot of weight."

Theme 1 Findings

Participants showed that physical health was an important part of overall wellness. Losing weight, feeling tired, and lacking the desire to eat were prominent, physical feelings participants expressed due to the divorce experience. Research findings were similar to current literature; divorce can negatively impact one's overall health, including emotional and physical health.

Theme 2: Relationships

The definition of relationships in regard to the Wheel of Life Model (Byrne, 2005) involves support and unconditional trust from friends and family. As Christian women, the participants included relationships with coworkers, pastors, and church members; however, the coworkers had no impact on feelings of support as part of the

divorce experience. When they did, coworkers were considered friends. Family, for the participants, included in-laws, ex-spouses, children, and other biological family members. Initially, before the divorce, the relationship with oneself appeared not to have been a focus. Relationships with former spouses became irrelevant as part of the divorce experience.

Children

Family relationships included the research participants' children. Not all of the research participants had children—two of them were childless. For those participants who had children, half said that it made their relationships stronger with their children. Lorraine said, “It made my relationship stronger because I felt I had to make up for the other parent.” Tina 1 related that “the divorce made us closer.” For Kim, however, her ex-spouse was not involved as a parent to their child, even prior to divorce. As such, it was a relief for him to be gone and for Kim's parent-child relationship to continue. Kim related:

So, when the divorce happened, he wasn't there to take her to school, but that was the case sometimes anyway even in the marriage. So, she and I just continued on with our routines, but the biggest change was the comfort in knowing we don't have to worry about if he's coming or not because he's not coming because it's over. So, we kept on going in the confidence in knowing that it's just us two and we will do this. We actually got closer. She had been wanting me to divorce him. She was finally glad I divorced her father.

Nikki's experience as a parent was similar to Kim's and Lorraine's but for different reasons. She reported that her children were afraid of their father. She stated that she had three children who “were fearful of him which made them closer to [her] because

it was just us.” However, the other half of participants who had children said that their relationships were strained due to the divorce. Tina 2 answered that her child had a close bond with the father, and the separation caused so many problems that the child “began to act out in school.” She had to make the hard decision “to relocate back” to a place where the father lived and let the child live with the father for a time, which affected their relationship during the divorce process because they were not able to live together even though she would visit her child often.

Other participants’ child-parent relationships were different because of having to adjust to the divorce when living in different households. For example, Sandy related:

They do express frustration when having to hop from home to home. I have found myself to be more stressed out and run down from the demands of personal and work life. I feel more likely to get after them and, with their father no longer there to be the mediator, I find our fallouts more intense.

Pretty had a different experience with her stepson; she no longer could have a relationship because he went to live with his biological father after the divorce.

Relationships with children were relevant to participants who had children. Not all participants had negative, relational experiences with their children. If there was a negative experience, it was mostly due to a change in the family dynamic and not due to the participants themselves.

Ex-Spouse. The relationship with the ex-spouse was reduced or did not exist if there were no children in the marriage. For example, both Juno and Phoenix responded “N/A” meaning that their relationships with their ex-spouse was not applicable. For those participants who did have children, four of the participants had either no contact or

limited contact with their ex-spouse. Nikki related, “He no longer talks to us and has remarried.” Kim reported the same experience as Nikki. Kim revealed that she no longer speaks with her ex-husband because their child is not in grade school. She stated:

He’s blocked, I don’t talk to him. I did, up until my daughter’s senior graduation I would talk to him, but he is not worth my time or conversation. I don’t deal with him because he is toxic and manipulative, period.

Lorraine had the same experience with her ex-spouse as did Nikki and Kim. Neither of these participants desired to have a relationship with their ex-spouses. For example, Lorraine expressed, “He’s kind of dead to me. I don’t even pay any mind to him.” Storm had a different experience because she and her ex-husband have grandchildren together and see one another on special days. Storm said that their interactions were “mostly during holidays and special occasions. We now have grandchildren.”

Relationships with ex-spouses were not important for most of the participants unless there was a need or personal desire to continue those relationships. If the ex-spouse relationship did continue, it was only in the context of family events, and they saw the ex-spouse like an extended family member only—no longer as a partner or best friend. It is important to note that one of the participants was remarried to her ex-spouse. The participant reported that they did have a better relationship as a married couple after the recommitment; however, this was not the case with any other participant in the study.

Coworkers. Coworkers are defined as persons who worked with the client when they were experiencing divorce or knew of them throughout the divorce process. Four of the participants did not expect friendships to develop with coworkers to the extent that they would share their divorce experiences and receive coworker support. For example,

Storm said, “I’ve never been a person to make a lot of friends at work. I’m a person who goes to work to work.” In addition, Tina 2 said, “I don’t let my co-workers into my business.” Juno reiterated what Storm and Tina 2 experienced with their co-workers, “Because you know your co-workers see that something’s happening, you try not to slack off too much.” In addition, Lorraine did not want her co-workers to know that she was divorced. She expressed, “I’m a private person, so I haven’t even talked to anybody to let them know that I am divorced. Yeh, no impact from co-workers.”

In summary, each of the participants above expressed that they did not want close relationships with their coworkers, but other participants did initially have those relationships or, after the divorce, developed those coworker relationships. Relationships with their coworkers were considered important friendships.

In-Laws. An in-law is a family member who is not related as a blood relative or who is a family members of the ex-spouse. Only three participants became closer to their in-laws, and relationships increased or had no effect on their relationships. For example, Juno said, “His family, they’re related to my sister as in-laws. They were very supportive and saying, ‘Oh, you’re not going anywhere. You’re still part of the family, not because of your sister, but because, just in general.’” Similarly, Sandy and Pretty had the same in-law relationships as Juno. Those relationships were not affected negatively by the divorce. For example, Sandy related, “The divorce did not hinder any relationships that I had.” In addition, Pretty shared:

I would actually have to say, it really wasn’t affected at all. And here’s the reason why, because they knew [me] and him [and] as well are prayerful; we’re very strong, we’re very individual people. It may have shocked some people because,

again, people didn't even know that we were heading that way or [that] things were going that way. It shocked a lot of people, but . . . to this day, his family is still my family. We still talk. I am still sister-in-law, they are still sisters-in-law, brother-in-law, auntie, the same way for him with my family.

Other research participants' relationships with in-laws were adversely affected by their divorce due to strains for various reasons. Lorraine and her ex-spouse caused a rift in their extended family relationships. Lorraine said, "The relationship between the two families is strained because of the dynamic between [him and me]." Tina 1 did not agree with how her in-laws disrespected her and allowed her ex-spouse to bring another woman to their home while she was married to him. She shared:

Well, I guess the biggest difference is [that] I did not communicate very much with my in-laws. Once we got a divorce, I kind of stopped fooling with my in-laws. Because we got a divorce due to infidelity, and what I found out later on is my in-laws knew. And so that kind of bothered me once I found out. Like, "Oh, really? You mean to tell me you got a daughter, and you would be okay with your son cheating?" And so not only were they okay with it, but they were also having, what do I want to call it? They were entertaining the lady that my husband was cheating with. They were having family weekend gatherings over there. He might tell me he was at his parents' house, and I'm like, "Okay, that's fine," but not knowing that the lady was over there too. I'm at church or I'm at an event with the kids, and he's over there hanging out at his mama's house with this lady like he's single.

The findings of the study showed that family in-law relationships were relevant, and participants did not automatically want to have those relationships unless there were valid reasons, such as not being respectful towards them or having discord between the ex-spouse after the divorce.

Family of Origin. A family of origin by definition included the participants' parents, siblings, and all other family members who were related by blood, excluding children. Some of the participants' families of origin were just as supportive during the divorce as they were before the divorce. If there had been a strain in the relationship between the participants and their biological families before the divorce, they became closer after the divorce process except if there was a barrier due to cultural beliefs surrounding divorce and marriage. For example, Nikki and her mother did not have a close relationship before she and her second husband were divorced. Nikki shared, "Me and my mom stopped talking for a whole year." When asked if this had been the case before the divorce, Nikki said:

Yes, it was before. Everything's fine. Oh yeah, yeah. Like I said, I moved in with them for about a year after the divorce so I could get on my feet. Oh, they're fine, they . . . were happy to have the grandkids home. I mean, of course . . . your mom always thinks her way is better so you just kind of got to listen to it and go on about your day.

Culture in the family can be of importance because family members may not agree that the couple should divorce for religious reasons, ethnic reasons, or due to the family relationships with the ex-spouse, which can cause a rift with the extended biological family. For example, Tina 2 did not agree that her mother should have a

continued relationship with her ex-spouse. This initially caused a disjointed relationship between her and her mother. Tina 2 said:

With family members, I guess I could say it got better, specifically with my mom. My mom has always been a champion of the marriage to the point where she would talk to my husband without me knowing, which I find deeply inappropriate and hurtful. I didn't like that. Maybe midway through the divorce process, or maybe after a year and a half, she did come to me, and she did apologize for appearing to be more loyal to him than me. She did affirm with me that she loves me, and she supports me. I feel like we have a better relationship now, so that was a journey to get to that point, but we do have a better relationship now.

In addition, Phoenix developed a better relationship with her biological family when she set boundaries with them. Phoenix related, "My relationship with family it became, let me see, the boundaries I set became [healthier] for me but then, also, I stopped looking at family as the enemy."

Sandy had a similar cultural experience as Tina 2, with her mother not wanting her to get a divorce because of traditional beliefs that the woman should stay married for her children and her family. For example, Sandy explained:

A lot had to do with our culture. My mom . . . was very quick to want the traditional American dream for me of family first and, you know, say no to everything else but your kids and your husband. And so, . . . I really feel . . . the dynamics of a traditional Mexican home, of a traditional Christian home, of a Christian home. And to this day, [she] and I butt . . . heads with the fact that I will not yield, I won't bow down, I won't allow myself to be controlled, not by my ex-

husband, not by her, not by anybody. And if I've got something to say, I will speak my mind, and if we're not going to be on any speaking terms, then that's the way it's going to be. I'm not going to quiet myself to accommodate somebody else. We were on speaking terms.

Research findings show that biological family relationships were relevant to participants' divorce recovery. Participants desired to have healthy relationships with their biological families. If there was a rift, they seemed to work out their problems and became closer with their biological families later in the divorce experiences.

Friends. Research participants described having close support from friends if they had close friends before the divorce or friends that they developed after the divorce occurred. For example, Juno said, "My friends and family . . . didn't ask many questions, they just let me talk. They were very supportive." In addition, Lorraine has the same friendships as she did during the marriage. She related, "My friends, they're fine."

Other participants, however, received support from current and new friendships that developed after the divorce. For example, Phoenix shared, "I have more friends than I did have when I was married." Nikki responded, "As far as my friends [are concerned], I think they just kind of rallied around me and told me everything was going to be okay one way or another." This study showed that friendship relationships are also important for divorced participants' supportive networks. Participants reported either no change in their friendship relationships, meaning that they remained the same with good support or that they developed new friendship relationships after the divorce occurred that were supportive.

Self. Participants described having lower self-esteem, self-blame, or self-doubt initially before the divorce and to the point where they questioned if there was anything that they could have done to keep the marriage together or that caused the marriage breakup. For example, Pretty shared:

With myself, I would have to say, [I was] very questionable of what I did, what I didn't do, or what could I have done better; whether I deserved it; why did it have to happen to me? A lot of questions, even questioning God.

Participants had similar experiences with feelings of inadequacy in that they could not keep their marriages. For example, Storm had the same experience as Pretty with feelings of failure due to her religious beliefs, comparing herself with others in her church who had similar situations and could reconcile their marriage. Storm had a similar experience questioning herself but not describing anger at God for the divorce. Storm described her questioning coming from a place of not understanding why her ex-spouse wanted to choose another woman besides herself:

I felt like I was a failure because I couldn't keep my marriage together. And there were other women in the church who were going through similar things with their husbands. And they were able, from the outside looking in, to work it out. I was not able to do that. And I felt like a failure. I also felt like a failure because I felt like my husband chose another woman over me. That definitely made me feel like a failure.

Juno described a different perspective than Storm or Pretty in that she did question later what she had done wrong in the marriage but was not angry with herself. She shared:

I wasn't necessarily angry at myself, but . . . it took me a few years to be like, "What did I do wrong?" I would rehash . . . at least the last year. Then I would rehash the last two years. I was like, "What did I do?" I felt like I had done something, and I couldn't figure out what I did. I wasn't angry at myself, but I couldn't figure out what I did wrong.

Research findings from the study revealed that initially or after the divorce the women questioned themselves as to why they could not save their marriage, which caused them to have self-doubt and lower self-esteem.

Relationship with the Church. For those participants who verbalized having close prior personal relationships with God, there was an expectation that they would receive encouragement and support from their church affiliation. Some went to their church first to seek guidance, comfort, and counseling only to be disappointed when they did not receive the emotional support they sought. Mostly, this was noted in their relationships with church members and their pastor.

Relationship with Church Members. Participants who identified as having a prior close relationship with their church members described not having the emotional support needed in their divorce experiences. For example, Storm looked to her church family and did not receive the support that she needed during her divorce experience. She related:

I still didn't feel like I had that support from my church family that I was looking for. In addition to feeling out of place, I didn't feel like I was being spiritually fed at the other church, like I was at my original church. So, I did become discouraged with my spiritual walk, with my faith. I never got to a point where I

gave up on God, never that, but I did give up on congregating with other Christians. I got to a point where I didn't trust anybody. Because of what happened to me, I became very disillusioned with who church people were and who they claimed to be, and who they pretended to be, church people being fake, and a couple other things. I ended up dating later in life. I ended up dating a pastor. I dated a pastor for four years. It was the most horrible, toxic relationship I've ever been in ever. The change in my faith did not only stem from my divorce, but it started there. That seed was planted. It grew into a place where now, I don't attend church anymore.

Similarly, Tina 2 had the same experience as Storm, and she has no further relationship with her church family. Although it was acknowledged that the participant was going through a divorce, Tina 2 did not feel the church family's emotional support, which can be seen when she shared, "I really don't talk to my church family anymore. I feel like they were way more supportive of him than me. They didn't call to check on me to see how I was doing, see if I needed anything, and I was in great need at that time."

Relationship with Pastor. The African American Church was instrumental to clients in their lives, including closeness to their church leaders and, most notably, their pastor. The relationship with their pastor or advice of their pastor can affect the client's divorce experience, which can be seen in the pastor's relationship with Kim during her divorce experience. She reported getting wrong advice from her pastor when he knew what she was enduring and still told her she should forgive her husband and stay in the marriage. Kim related:

One thing that did affect me was my relationship with my pastor because he, I felt like, was too forgiving of my ex-husband and his shenanigans, and, because I was the one who was more mature in the religion, in the faith, he felt that I should have been more forgiving, more understanding in my prayer closet, this and that. And he had made the comment one day that I made the decision to divorce my husband, and I had to let him know [that] I didn't make the decision to divorce anything, he cheated on me, and the Bible says that I can leave. And you of all people know how much I tried, and how long I stayed, and how much I endured. So, my pastor actually ended up apologizing, if you will, for his comment, but to this day . . . and that was in 2018, 'til this day I will not forget that. And I won't say that I won't forgive him, I know that he is old-fashioned, but I will never forget that comment. And for him, my pastor has told me before, "You're like a spiritual daughter to me," because I had been a member since 2002. If I'm a spiritual daughter to him, [he] should definitely have a different outlook. But anyway, that's basically what's been affected is that relationship.

Tina 2 had a similar experience as Kim and Storm because she, too, felt misguided by her pastor and thus she did not want Christian counseling. She had to seek emotional, mental health services outside her place of worship. Tina 2 said:

I did seek a spiritual pastor initially. After the initial incident. There was an initial incident in November of 2017 that sparked the separation. Initially, at that time, we went to our pastor. But then, when things fell apart again in January of 2018, I felt kind of betrayed or misguided, led astray by my pastor. I felt like he didn't give me good advice. Moving forward, I think I specifically asked for

somebody not to come at me from a Christian perspective. I specifically requested not to have that, because I needed real help and I felt like someone coming from a Christian background was only going to tell me something that they felt like they had to say, whether they believed it was in my best interest or not. And I needed real help, so I was very clear about [not wanting] somebody from a Christian background, or they can have a Christian background but don't talk to me about it when we're in counseling. That was my initial preference when I started therapy back in 2018.

Storm related:

I was very, very close to my ex-pastor and his wife at the church that my ex-husband and I attended. And when we divorced, I felt like they chose sides. And my ex-husband was having a relationship with a woman in our church. And there was actually a woman in the circle that we hung out with. I went to my pastor and his wife for support. I went to them in confidence to speak to them about what I was going through. A lot of what I divulged to them and a lot of what I confided in them ended up back in the church. That was very, very devastating to me because I was very close to them. I wholeheartedly trusted them. I trusted them with things about my marriage that no one else knew, not even my closest friends. When some of those things ended up back in the church, it was completely devastating in not only my trust but my faith. That's the main reason why I left that church and went to another church.

Theme 2 Findings

Study findings showed that for participants who had prior close relationships with their church members and pastors, these relationships were highly important in their emotional healing. Not all individuals had a problem with emotional support from their pastors, but for the three participants who did, they went to their houses of worship to seek it. When they did not receive the right help, they had to seek mental health assistance outside of the church. For some, it impacted them to not go back to the church nor to ever develop trust in church members or pastors.

This study's findings on relationships are in line with literature. Relationships matter in the divorce experience for Black and Hispanic women as compared to other races experiencing divorce. Family relationships for all groups, particularly those with children, were not hindered by the parent-child relationship but were more due to dynamics of the divorce itself. This research study did not explore the effects the divorce experience had on children.

Ex-spouse relationships for the majority of time were non-existent; if they were present, the relationship was forever changed in that it resembled more of an extended family member relationship than a close friend or intimate partner relationship. In-law relationships remained intact unless the relationship was hindered by specifics of divorce itself, such as the participant and the ex-spouse not being on good terms or the participants or in-laws themselves by choice not wanting to continue the relationship. Biological family relationships can be constrained because of cultural beliefs about divorce or not wanting to sever ties with the ex-spouse. This hindered the relationship with some of the participants' biological family members; however, when this occurred,

the women were able to renew their relationships with biological family members. Sometimes it required increasing relational boundaries with them.

Theme 3: Spirituality

Spirituality involves an individual's spiritual practices and one's awareness of something that brings meaning to one's life and existence (Mayer, 2020). The participants identified as having a Christian belief system; therefore, this study assessed the participants' Christian belief systems and their responses to perceptions about Christian spirituality based on their divorce experiences, which provided three subcategories—faith and prayer, relationship with God, and relationship with self.

Faith and Prayer. Participants used faith and prayer to work through the emotional struggles they had due to divorce experiences either because of the loss of a spouse or because the family system they had known was gone. For example, Storm still exercised Christian spiritual practices although she did not attend church and felt offended by church members. Storm said:

I prayed for God to fix my marriage. When it became evident that was not going to happen, I started praying for God to soften my heart because there came a point where my grief and my anger and my pain got so overwhelming that I felt like I started to hate my ex-husband. And even though he [had] wronged me, as a Christian, that's not a feeling that I wanted to have. So, my prayer after that came to be for God to soften my heart, because I did get to a point where I felt like I hated him. And I think that's what my grief and my pain turned into. It turned into hate, and it was a pretty strong emotion.

Lorraine had a similar experience to Storm in that she, too, displayed angry emotions and used the spiritual practice of prayer to assist her in feeling empowered during and after the divorce. Lorraine shared:

I've been able to pray my way through a lot of emotions. That day when I did have a lot of anger because I felt like, "This is just not fair, after everything I've done and after all that I've tried to do, this is not working." As time moved on and I really reconciled, by myself, the part that I played in our marriage, some of my behavior, as well as coming to terms with where we were because we had gotten together really young and then we got married young, where I was at the time wasn't the same place that he was. If anything, my faith has really remained strong if not stronger, but it hasn't decreased because it's helped me to . . . reflect on myself and . . . to also allow me to let go of certain resentment that I had towards him.

Sandy expressed:

I did feel like I needed to grab a stronger hold [on] my faith. I found myself going to church more, praying more, really, really trying to feel love [from] physical, empowering, inspirational sermons or messages. I did feel that I needed that more, but it was not necessarily related to my divorce. Unfortunately, it was related to the relationship that I started because my divorce; it was really mere paperwork. The emotions were gone. I feel or felt nothing for my ex-husband. It was me trying to start a healing process of losing my family, the life that I have known for [more than] 15 years but just not being equipped with the proper support system.

Participants who relied on their faith described having increased faith because of the divorce. For example, Pretty said:

It's easy because of my faith. I was raised and I'm very, very strong in my faith. What I learned through that is the understanding that God's word says, "Those that he has put together, let no man put it asunder." What I had to learn and understand [was] that God doesn't put everyone together as far as marriage. He ordains marriages but some people get married just because they choose to get married. And in my counseling, I discovered that I decided to get married, because I got married late in life at the age of 41. But I got married because I chose to get married. With my faith, I can say that I believed in it. It's not to say that God put us together. That's what I had to hold onto. I had my faith to hold onto because God's word tells me that he will never leave me or forsake me and that he will support all of my needs, according to his riches in glory, not mine. I really had to lean stronger in my faith when it came to what it is and the decisions I was making. I had to make everything based upon the promises of God.

This research study findings showed that spiritual practices helped heal those who identified as believers. Further, participants who practiced the spiritual practice of prayer and used their faith felt stronger within themselves. These practices increased their hopefulness that all would get better.

Relationship with God. Participants expressed that their relationships with God had increased since divorce because they relied on Christian spiritual practices. A relationship with God was the reason that they were able to make it through the divorce process. Others continued a relationship with God despite the emotionally traumatic

divorce experience. Nikki, through her relationship with God, used scripture to assist her in self-talk and the healing process. She said:

And I'm okay because I know that I tried to do what I thought was pleasing to God and because I did my best to delight myself in him. I know that he is giving me the desires of my heart in his timing, and I'm okay with that.

Kim shared:

I think I had gone through so much . . . that I was very depressed before I decided to get the divorce. One day I just woke up and said, "Enough is enough." So, I don't know if I grieved. I'm pretty sure I did, because, like I said, the day that the divorce was final, when I had to go to court, there were tears, and then with that was also relief and acceptance. It's like I just said, knowing that God kept me, knowing that I could have been dead, I could have died by suicide. I thought about it. I could have been in jail for murder. I thought about that. So, my faith, basically it's because of my faith and my connection, and God's hands on me, that I know that I'm still alive today. I have my freedom, [and] I didn't act on foolish things because God kept me. So, during and after, I still look to God. Am I perfect? No, but I do still look to God . . . for strength [and] for covering. God kept me.

Kim continued:

As far as the faith as a whole, nope, I still know who God is, I still know what God can do for me, I still love the Lord, I still am grateful. I'm okay with the divorce and everything, I'm great with where I am right now, and I'm great when

I walk through my house knowing that I don't have to be bothered with foolery anymore. And I know that all of that is because God kept me.

Reliance upon a relationship with God was central for those participants who desired to use their Christian faith to help them find hope for the future. They did not give up their relationship with God. For example, Storm looked to God even though she did not have trust in her pastor or church members. She said, "I feel like I am spiritual. I feel like I still have a relationship with God. I still talk to Him daily. I still rely on Him. I still believe He's the head of my life."

Phoenix had a similar experience to Storm. She did not attend a worship service at the time but identified as having a relationship with God that was closer because of her divorce experience. This can be seen in what she shared:

I think it increased it since the divorce. When I was married, I did not understand what it meant to build a relationship with God. I just thought you're supposed to go to church every Sunday. And, as long as you're living by these religious practices that you learn in church, then you'll be saved and go to heaven. I did not understand that building a relationship with God is much more, deeper than physically going to church. So, my faith has grown since the divorce because I am learning different avenues that I can use for my spirituality. The prayer groups that I was a part of that teach you more about reading your Bible, more about God, [that God] just did not put us here, he does not punish. . . . just talking to the people who are more spiritually sound and have taken the time to really dissect the Bible and be a guide for someone young like me, people who do not understand as well as they do, who haven't experienced life as much as they have.

So being exposed to those avenues and prayer lines and prayer groups that are nondenominational has really helped me understand that to build a relationship with God is more prestige work than going to church.

The findings of the study showed that spiritual practices and a relationship with God helped participants heal and were important in their divorce recovery. The findings of this study compared favorably to the literature in that spirituality matters. These findings also compared favorably to similar experiences of White women when it was discovered that both Black and Hispanic Christian divorced women sought out a relationship with God as part of the healing process during divorce.

Relationship with Self. Participants reported having stronger spiritual relationship within themselves, which can be seen in their decision-making. For example, Lorraine said:

I'm definitely more patient. I do believe when the Bible says, well it does say we should not be alone, but I feel like we were created for fellowship. We were created not to be by ourselves. I try to live that out a lot. Sometimes it's hard, but it's definitely made me more compassionate, too. I would say that.

Theme 3 Findings

This research study's findings showed spirituality to be different from religion. Participants who practiced their spirituality before the divorce leaned heavily upon it both during and afterwards. Those persons who may not have practiced as much, however, found that they were engaging in spiritual practices more due to the divorce experience. Spirituality was relevant for Black and Hispanic women in divorce even if they did not attend houses of worship and regardless of whether they were Protestant or Catholic.

Theme 4: Finances

The Wheel of Life Model highlights the topic of finances as generally involving personal finances and specifically how a person feels about achieving financial goals. Participants discussed personal insights on their view of finances. Some had more money than before the divorce. For example, some participants were the breadwinners, and their finances did not change after the divorce. Tina 1 described having more money after the divorce because she made the most money in the family before she divorced:

[Regarding] my spiritual beliefs, I always just believed that God has a plan and a purpose. And for whatever reason, I was selected to go through this. And I guess if he takes me to it, he'll bring me through it. . . . My finances [were] fine. I worked. I made the most money. So, . . . we didn't miss [anything] when he moved out and we were divorced. My daughter didn't miss anything.

In addition, like Tina 1, Tina 2 had more money because she did not have a spouse and was able to focus on her career and increase her work which, in turn, caused her income to rise. She said:

My workload has increased. I have probably thrown myself into work more, because I don't have a husband that I have to cook for every night or have the house clean and stuff like that. I think it has made me throw myself into work more, which ultimately was a good thing, because now I make a lot more money, although I do have to be conscious about balancing that. But I think the divorce has caused me to work more.

Other participants struggled financially due to the divorce. For example, Phoenix was not the breadwinner when she was married and had to work toward achieving financial stability after the divorce. She shared:

Financially, I was struggling. When it was first going on, it took me about two years to really start to have a turnaround in my finances after the divorce. I'm just getting to the point where I am not living check-to-check. The first two years, the struggle was very real in being able to afford things. And I would find multiple avenues of income just to take care of myself. Okay. I was working and barely able to afford my rent, but I would make sure I paid it; or, if I would pay my rent, I may not have enough money to pay my light bill; or, if I pay all of my bills, I might not have enough money for gas or food. So that's how it impacted [me] negatively. It was not enough to carry as opposed to when I had two incomes, it was enough, and we had extra money left over. But I didn't have extra money, so it was very hard financially.

Theme 4 Findings

This research study's findings showed that divorced Black and Hispanic Christian women had varying encounters with finances as a result of the overall divorce experience. Finances can have a negative impact on the divorce experience. The amount of money they had depended on whether they had been the breadwinners before the divorce, or whether they obtained additional financial assistance, such as having the opportunity for increased work.

Theme 5: Life Goals

Life goals are defined as both personal and professional development opportunities. Personal development involves intellectual pursuits. Examples of intellectual pursuits are education, travel, culture, and learning. Participants noted that their divorces created personal and/or professional development opportunities.

Personal Development. Following divorce, five participants learned to create new lives for themselves by including themselves as a number one priority. For example, Pretty could not focus on developing life goals prior to divorce because she was focused on the emotional pain of the divorce experience; however, after receiving mental health counseling and relying on her spiritual faith in God, she has renewed hope for her future:

Going through counseling . . . was like learning, starting over, putting myself first and loving me for who I am and not what other people wanted me to be or what people wanted me to do. And once I got the concept of that, [I made] me [a] priority, not saying that I couldn't help anyone, wouldn't do anything for anyone, that I had to take care of me first. I had to learn to love me first. . . . I'm saying [that] in learning and beginning to do that was amazing, because now everything was about me. If I wanted to go shopping, I started to reward myself for the fruits of my labor. Every first day, I [reward] myself with some major things, material things, things that I couldn't really do before when I was married. Just making decisions for me. I [do not] have to consider anyone else's thought, what it is they wanted me to do, how they wanted me to do [it]. It was the decisions of the things that I chose to do, things that I wanted to do—if I wanted to get up, I'm going out of town for the weekend, I'm through this, or I'm going to go past that. I didn't

have to check or get anyone's permission and I didn't care what others thought of what it is I should do [or what] they wanted me to do [and] how I should do it. I didn't care whether they judged me or not. It was about me and the things that I wanted to do when I want to and how I want to do it. And now, I've been divorced for five and a half years. I can tell you, the last three and a half years, probably four, my life has been and is amazing. I laugh more, I smile more, I have a completely different circle of friends. My life is really, really good.

Juno had a similar response as Pretty in that she, too, was focused on herself more than before the divorce experience. She started a hobby that she had previously stopped doing—running. Juno said:

I mean, eventually when I told myself, "Okay, that's enough feeling sorry for yourself," I picked up running just so that, well, it started with walking, just so I could get out of the house and get out of my head. And then, it turned into running.

Additional examples can be seen in other participants, such as Sandy and Phoenix. Sandy explained, "I found myself more vigilant." Phoenix began volunteering, along with additional hobbies such as crocheting and decorating her residence to improve herself personally. She related:

I initially started volunteering because it kept me from being in the house and helping people does bring me joy. I haven't volunteered in a while just because my schedule doesn't allow it, but volunteering is what I was doing in the beginning. My hobbies change, they changed for me. . . . Now I got back to crocheting, to the point that I sell blankets now. Another hobby that I picked up on

[was that] I didn't know how to keep a plant alive. I'm kidding. It creates this synergy and makes me calm, decorating the house, things like that. I find it gives me synergy and makes me calm and it gives me something to do, . . . just going out with friends and family, just having fun with my nieces and nephews and stuff like that.

Other examples were that the participants increased their self-worth and included themselves in their decision-making, asking themselves what they wanted and determining their own needs. This can be seen in Lorraine, when her focus became paying off debt as a personal goal along with a desire to travel more. She said:

I'm really focused on me. I've really been focused on paying my bills off. I'm paying off all of my credit card debt and paying off my automobile and paying off my house. That has been really my focus. Those have been my goals. Now my goal, ultimately, is to pay off my house and then this way, pay off my house and travel. I'm at a point now in my life where my daughter's college is paid for. Now that her college is paid for and she's actually graduating this year with her master's degree, now I'm just focused on the house and traveling.

Research findings for personal development included life goals that brought the participants joy by including themselves in leisure activities, volunteering, getting out of debt, and focusing on bettering their environment where they lived. Personal development was an important aspect of developing life goals in that it brought emotional self-worth when seeking activities that brought meaning to self.

Professional Development. Participants described their experiences of wanting a better life for themselves by working harder and developing new goals. For example, Nikki shared:

Well, I went back to school, not that I had been a dropout or [anything]. But I got my master's, and my goal was to get my master's before [my daughter] got her high school diploma, which I did. I got it just one week before she got her high school diploma. Just showing her different things as far as paying bills, being responsible, trying to show her a path of being a responsible young woman, that you can make it on your own. A spouse is an added bonus. But in the meantime, just know that you can do things regardless.

Professional development was a major subtheme for participants because a majority of participants cited educational achievement as a professional, developmental goal after the divorce. For example, like Nikki, Tina 2 went back to college and earned a second master's degree. She said:

I got another Master's. So, I [have] two Master's [degrees] now. . . . So, yes, I love my husband. But I am important, [and] my kids are important. But I don't know. I think, in my mind, I may have given more of myself to him than in the marriage. I gave my all to satisfy everything. So, at this point now for me, I too have to be important. In my mind, it's like, my mom was a go-getter, as far as that matters. She took care of everything. So, I think maybe I was just following what I knew, as far as taking care of everything like my mom did. And a lot of times, . . . my mom put herself last. So now, I try to make me a priority as well.

Storm was encouraged through divorce experience to advance in her career. Storm related:

Actually, the divorce motivated me. I was determined to climb the corporate ladder. After the divorce, I went back to school. My ex-husband was not encouraging in that regard. He was not supportive of me going back and finishing my degree while we were married. That's one of the first things I did for [myself] after divorce was go back to school. I was determined to be a career woman. So, it actually helped me. It actually drove me, gave me motivation.

Additionally, just as the other four participants, Storm excelled by returning to college and completing a bachelor's degree. She said, "I decided to go back to school to get my bachelor's degree when we first even separated. Then, actually, right before our divorce was final, I graduated with my bachelor's."

Contributions to Society. Clients described finding new meaning after their divorce experience and being happy to share their new meaning with others as a consequence of having come to an acceptance of their new life due to personal and professional growth. Storm said:

There was life after divorce. Sometimes, you can't see the forest for the trees. You're so bogged down in that bad circumstance, which you don't realize at the time is temporary. It's hard to see past that temporary situation because it's so bad. . . . You can go on and be a healthy individual without being married, you know what I mean? That you can live life and live it abundantly as a single person. Or, if life happens and you end up getting married again, which I have

not, that that can happen too. But it gave me a positive outlook on a future after divorce.

Theme 5 Findings

The findings of the study showed that although the participants initially felt emotionally saddened surrounding divorce events, they grew through their divorce experiences becoming stronger emotionally and physically. This was a result of having personal and professional life goals, which helped lead them toward a discovery of meaning in their divorce experiences and hope for their futures.

Summary

This chapter presented the results of the study involving eight Black and two Hispanic women post-divorce. The purpose of this study was to investigate the lived experiences of divorced Black and Hispanic Christian women. Moustakas's (1994) modified Van Kamp method was used, and five themes were generated: (a) health, (b) relationships, (c) spirituality, (d) finances, and (e) life goals. Qualitative interviews were conducted using semi-structured interviews based upon a cross-sectional design. Inductive reasoning was used as an observational tool to develop a generalized understanding of these women's lived experiences. It was not used to confirm or deny anything about the experience of these women in comparison to others, but to explore their lived experience with divorce. Participants' explicit statements were used to explore the essence of the phenomenon when analyzing the data.

Regarding Theme 1: Health, participants showed strong emotional responses more than a physical response to the divorce experience. Similarly, in Theme 2: Relationships, participants showed relationships as relevant to the healing process. Ex-

spouses and coworkers were not as important in some cases as a biological family. Just as important were pastor and church-member relationships. When those relationships were broken, the devastation was equal to the emotional hurt of the divorce itself. Nevertheless, when co-workers were relevant, they maintained the same level as friendship relationships.

Surprisingly, in Theme 3: Spirituality, the participants' spirituality was not impacted by whether they attended houses of worship or had negative experiences with church members or pastors. Spiritual practices of prayer and having faith in God along with their relationships with God helped most of the participants through their divorce journeys. In Theme 4, finances caused additional anxiety for women who did not have financial stability before the divorce occurred. As they were able to become financially stable, however, their worry and anxiety decreased. Finally, in Theme 5: Life Goals, success was imminent because the women found hope for the future as well as emotional strength through achievement of personal and professional goals after the divorce. In Chapter 5, a discussion of the themes, literature, summary, limitations, recommendations for future research, and conclusion are explored.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Limitations, Recommendations

This transcendental, phenomenological study investigated the lived experiences of divorced Black and Hispanic Christian women. It explored the influence of Christianity on these women's lives and how religious beliefs affected emotional responses to divorce experiences in order to assist them with improved levels of resiliency.

Marriage is seen by many as one of the most solid and respected foundations in human relationships. A study by Hawkins et al. (2015) revealed that "66% reported that they do not want a divorce, with 43% saying they were willing to work hard on their marriages to prevent it" (Bell et al., 2018, p. 3). Not all marriages last forever, and research has shown that marital dissolution can be an emotionally traumatic experience for both men and women (Lin et al., 2019; Thomas & Ryan, 2008). Divorce is a process that is experienced over time and has the influence of shaping people (Amato, 2000; Lin et al., 2019). For some, the divorce may bring relief and is viewed as an opportunity to grow (Thomas & Ryan, 2008).

Divorce creates crucial challenges for society and families. The divorce process can influence people emotionally, physically, and spiritually; it can impact careers, relationships, intellectual pursuits, and life goals, and it also results in additional challenges for Black and Hispanic women. Prior research has shown an additional negative impact on these groups of women (Dew et al., 2020; Lawson & Satti, 2016). Research has shown that people look to spiritual practices for support when undergoing a divorce. This study included the influence of Christian spirituality upon the divorce experience for Black and Hispanic women.

Summary of the Study

Literature was compiled from research in Chapter 2 to describe experiences of divorced women, specifically, divorced African American/Black and Hispanic women. A discussion was included in Chapter 2 about the importance of religious practices or spirituality in the African American/Black and Hispanic communities and how they related to the divorce experience. The reason for this study was that there is limited research specifically addressing divorce experiences of Black and Hispanic Christian women. The goal of this study was to address the gap.

The research question was, “What are the lived experiences of divorced black and Hispanic Christian women?” The research question was formulated and influenced by the Wheel of Life Model used in positive psychology to assess clients’ careers, health, spirituality, relationships, intellectual pursuits, finances, and life goals, which include personal and professional development.

Eight Black and two Hispanic Christian divorced women between the ages of 33-57 were selected for the study. The study investigated the influence of Christianity on these women’s lives and how their religious beliefs affected emotional responses to divorce experiences in order to assist them in gaining higher levels of resiliency. Each semi-structured interview was audio recorded and automatically transcribed. The transcription was also professionally conducted manually; the results of both transcriptions were then compared and sent to the participants for fact-checking. Coding was initially completed manually. Final coding was done with the assistance of Dedoose analysis and data software. Moustakas’s (1994) version of Van Kamp’s phenomenological research method procedures were used for data analysis. Five themes

emerged as follows, with subthemes emerging within each theme: (a) health, (b) relationships, (c) spirituality, (d) finances, and (e) life goals.

Discussion of Findings

Theme 1: Health Discussion

In the first theme, health, two subthemes emerged: emotional health and physical health. The literature supports these responses and also shows how marital dissolution can lead to poor health (Lin et al., 2019), either temporally or chronically. Poor emotional health impacted physical health so that participants could not, initially, view a sense of resiliency. Results regarding emotional health were similar to van de Meer's (2018) in that people examined a life problem and perceived whether they could cope with it.

Emotional Health. When participants described their emotional health being impacted, it paralleled grief responses (Kubler-Ross, 1969). Amato (2000) described divorce as stressful for all persons involved, including adults and children if children were in the marriage relationship. Before accepting that their marriage relationship was over, participants mentioned feeling a range of grief emotions including disbelief, depression and sadness, anger, fear, and worry. While grief emotions were apparent, not all participants felt every grief emotion. For some, the range of emotions was not due to sadness that they were no longer with their ex-spouse; rather, that family relationships as had been known were ending. For others, concerns included financial fear and worry, effects on affordable housing, and resiliency of the children regarding how they would experience the divorce along with the breakup of family relationships. In the divorce process, these Black and Hispanic women initially felt extremely high levels of anger,

two felt suicidal, and at least one mentioned feeling homicidal toward her ex-spouse early in the divorce experience.

Further, aligning with literature (e.g., De Oliveira et al., 2017; Ellison et al., 2012; Lopez et al., 2018), Hispanic and Black women had more traumatizing divorce experiences than White women. In addition, this study aligned with Wolfelt's (2008) six-model divorce transition. First, individuals had to acknowledge the reality of the divorce; second, they needed to let themselves feel the pain of the divorce; third, they needed to shift their relationships with the former spouse; fourth, they would be required to develop a new self-identity; fifth, they had to search for meaning; and sixth, they needed support from others to help them move forward with a new life after divorce (Wolfelt, 2008). Participants sought support from others throughout different phases of the divorce process, specifically from families, friends, church members, and pastors.

Acceptance was seen when clients mentioned moving forward with life. This study aligned with the literature in that there was a universal experience in divorce in terms of women's emotions due to the dissolution of their marriages, but most expressed that they would recover and find meaning (Wolfelt, 2008). Black and Hispanic women in this study aligned with those findings.

Physical Health. Physical health was discussed when it was impacted by emotions experienced by clients. For some, physical health was not an issue. The findings showed that physical health was not as prevalent or impacted as much as emotional health for the Black and Hispanic women in the study.

Theme 2: Relationships Discussion

The theme of relationships emerged with four subthemes, including (a) family, including children, ex-spouse, in-laws, and family of origin; (b) friends and coworkers; (c) relationship with self; and (d) extended relationships, such as relationships with other church members and their pastor. According to Lawson and Satti (2016), gender, class, religion, and sociocultural status influence an individual's divorce experience. Findings from this study are supportive of the literature. Within family relationships, Lawson and Satti suggested that "extended family members provide financial resources, childcare, and protection from violence" (p. 37). Family relationships were important for emotional support, finances, children, and work-life balance, which was true for Black and Hispanic women in this study.

Family Relationships. Some Black and Hispanic women continued living in the same locations either in the same city or living space, and family relationships were not impacted. Others had to move out or move to another location due to jobs and needs regarding familial support. For participants with children, the divorce had an impact on relationships with their children when the other parent moved out. This action either brought participants closer to their children when children wanted parents to divorce or children were negatively impacted because of various factors, including moving away from familiar environments.

Literature provides evidence that extended family relationships are relevant for divorced women (Lawson & Satti, 2016). Ex-spouses were notably not supporting these women for the most part during the divorce experience, and most participants were not looking to them for emotional support due to their initial emotions from the divorce

experience. Even so, one of the participants reunited with her ex-husband, and they were married at the time of writing.

The Black and Hispanic women who had close relationships with their in-laws continued those relationships if they chose to do so. Those who did not have a close relationship, however, did not always continue with their in-laws but kept other family and friend relationships. Relationships of Black and Hispanic women during and after divorce corresponded to Lawson and Satti (2016), who determined that most divorced women found sustaining family and friendship relationships relevant for their post-divorce adjustment.

Relationship with Self. According to Brown and Coker (2019), most of one's identity is enveloped in how one views one's relationship with self as well as within one's family experiences. For example, societal pressures impact Black and Hispanic divorce experiences, according to findings. Participants reported initial self-blame or shame for the dissolution of the marriage. The same can be seen for White women, but for Black and Hispanic women part of the shame was due to Christian or cultural beliefs that they were supposed to keep the marriage together and maintain a commitment to the family. For example, several Black and Hispanic women described feeling devastated and sad initially due to divorce and wondered what they could have done to keep the marriage and family intact. Some of the women described blaming God for the marriage breakup, which is similar to Cohen's (2019) findings that divorced women overall have a difficult time accepting the divorce, often desiring a miracle cure to keep their marriages together.

According to Stroebe and Shut (2010), negative thoughts create worry and anxiety and for Black and Hispanic women, it causes additional fear and worry. Black and

Hispanic women who did not have a stable financial status before the divorce felt worried about their financial status after the divorce; in addition, fear and worry were present due to the possibility of changing children's schools, not having both parents present, and lack of financial support. Further, societal pressures influenced Black women since traditional African American culture discourages divorce (Vaterlaus et al., 2016).

Black women in the study voiced not wanting to be seen as a natural statistic of a single Black mother living in poverty with her children, which aligned with Hurt et al. (2013) who cited African Americans being affected by social issues such as poverty, educational levels, and unemployment, which can contribute to divorce. Additionally, the Black and Hispanic women did not want to be viewed as not supporting their spouses in the marriage. Additional societal challenges arose in the workplace where, for example, a participant needed to work due to being divorced because her husband had been the primary breadwinner. One of the women experienced discrimination since she held a degree when another person who had received the management position did not, even though guidelines stated that one needed a bachelor's degree to qualify for the position.

Relationship with Friends and Co-Workers. Black and Hispanic women were able to obtain support from friendships just as for Whites; however, some Black and Hispanic women reported that friends developed from work relationships after the divorce as well as new social relationships being created after divorce, which coincides with the findings of Lawson and Satti (2016). Pre-divorce, however, some did not want coworkers to know of their divorce experiences because they did not initiate those relationships prior to the divorce. When coworkers did become friends, they were quite supportive.

Relationship with Church Members and Pastors. Relationships with church members and pastors depended upon the level of Christian spirituality of each Black or Hispanic woman. Two participants described themselves as Christian believers though not actively practicing their faith prior to divorce, yet both learned to rely more on their faith during the divorce experience.

For this study, participants expressed whether they actively sought their Christian faith for support. For women who identified as heavily involved in their Christian faith prior to the divorce, those relationships were quite supportive. However, when relationships were non-supportive, participants left their churches either to seek another fellowship or not to return to a church building after the divorce was finalized. Trust in church members was impacted negatively as a result of the perceived lack of support.

Another factor was that when participants sought pastoral advice or biblical counsel before or after the divorce, the counsel was often not well-received. According to Beach et al. (2011), the Bible and Christian teaching that “God is love” affected those persons’ perceptions of their experiences when they sought spiritual guidance and emotional support from their places of worship. According to Fincham et al. (2011), African American women often seek guidance and emotional support from their pastors and church members, yet three Black females in the study reported that they did not receive emotional support or Christian spiritual guidance. As a result, two of the three participants no longer attended formal religious fellowship and the third person’s relationship with her pastor was destroyed.

Each of these women left the church they had been attending and sought emotional health guidance outside of the church with a mental health counselor. One of

the participants sought mental health counseling but then declined, not wanting Christian spirituality as a part of her mental health counseling. The participant described stepping away from Christian spiritual practices for that period in her healing. Pastor and church-member support networks were heavily seen as emotional support for Black and Hispanic women who used their Christian spirituality to assist their emotional resilience.

According to Lipka (2015), the Catholic Church teaches that marriage vows should not be broken, and an annulment from the Catholic Church is needed for divorced Catholics to remarry. Catholic teachings affected the divorce experiences of Hispanic women either with family or with concern around being able to remarry. For example, one of the participants was concerned that if she got a divorce, no one would want to marry her because of her Catholic faith.

The literature further confirmed that Black and Hispanic women practicing their Christian spiritual faith relied on their Christian spirituality for coping (Barnes et al., 2020; Bauer et al., 2017; Cervantes & Parham, 2005; Fincham & Beach, 2013). Initially, participants sought counsel from church leadership before seeking other mental health counseling. However, when they did not receive what they perceived as supportive and helpful, they discontinued counseling at their church, sought counseling outside the church, and did not want the mention of Christianity in their counseling due to feelings of emotional disregard.

Theme 3: Spirituality Discussion

Two major subthemes emerged from the major theme of spirituality: (a) faith and prayer and (b) relationship with God. The third aspect, Relationship with Self, is woven into the two major subthemes below.

Faith and Prayer. As discussed in the literature review in Chapter 2, the dominant religion of Hispanic women is Catholicism. The Hispanic women in this study self-identified in kind. Although they were not active practitioners before the divorce, each described still believing in God. Five Black participants verbalized having faith and praying to God, along with continuing to believe in God as their source of help, to develop a strong personal relationship with self. Faith became the primary factor in making it through the divorce experience in a healthier manner despite discontinuing relationships with some church members. Divorce support groups in their churches also assisted in their healing. Spiritual practices were important to Black and Hispanic women who desired to deepen their faith.

Similar to Abrams et al.'s (2014) findings, African Americans form the largest religious group in the United States. According to Davenport (2016), this is due to the discrimination they experience. In this study, spirituality and religion for women of color played a major role in divorce recovery, especially for the Black women who actively practiced Christian spirituality. Lawson and Satti (2016) revealed that White and Pakistani women “rely on spiritual and religious beliefs; however, Black women verbalized the need for divorce prevention strategies, looking to the Black Church for marital stability” (p. 2). Davenport (2016) advocates that for women of color, religion plays a major role in the divorce healing process.

Relationship with God. For some of the Black and Hispanic women, their relationship with God increased while others came to use their relationship with God more often. Davenport (2016) advocated that religion for women of color plays a major role in their divorce healing process. In this study, for Black and Hispanic women,

personal relationships with God varied depending upon whether the women felt close to God before the divorce occurred. For example, one of the Hispanic participants described herself as a Christian, believing in the tenets of Catholicism but not actively practicing her faith. With most Black and Hispanic participants, relationship with God did not diminish whether they went to a church regularly; neither did relationship with God decrease due to pastor or church member responses.

Theme 4: Finances Discussion

Two subthemes emerged from the major financial theme: (a) more money versus less money and (b) increased work.

More Money *versus* Less Money. Leopold (2018) described that African American women have more challenges due to their divorce experiences. For Black and Hispanic participants who relied on their former spouses for financial stability, worry and fear were major responses initially when faced with wondering about their financial future prior to the divorce. These responses aligned with the literature regarding the financial challenges of divorce. The absence of one of the parents who was a financial provider increased financial difficulties; most experts noted this in single-parent households led by women (Brown & Coker, 2019; Leopold, 2018; Mortelmans, 2021). If a participant was the breadwinner in the family, there was no change in finances and thus no worry was present.

Increased Work. When participants were motivated to work more, financial status often changed. They usually had more money after the divorce or were able to adjust to the new financial status. Mortelmans (2021) affirmed that ambiguous losses

affect families. Specifically, the financial aspect of divorce can negatively affect the female head of households after divorce (Mortelmans, 2021).

Theme 5: Life Goals Discussion

The major life-goal theme emerged with two subthemes: (a) personal development and (b) professional development. Life goals aligned with literature regarding hope and self-care. According to Redlich-Amirav et al. (2018), when people can reach specific goals, they are hopeful for the future. As discussed in Chapter 2, hope is a positive emotion (Redlich-Amirav et al., 2018). Meeting predetermined goals yield positive emotions. In addition, Millstein et al. (2019) found that optimism is an indicator of hope because people can have greater resilience in making efforts to achieve the goals they have set. The Black and Hispanic women experienced similar hope and optimism as described by Redlich-Amirav et al. (2018) because they began to focus on themselves as they increasingly accepted their life situations.

Personal Development. Black and Hispanic participants actively desired more interpersonal pursuits so they sought to embrace activities that previously they had wanted to pursue but had not taken those opportunities during married life or simply had not tried them before. This included social activities.

Professional Development. Lozano et al. (2021) described divorced women losing their jobs within two years of divorce. In this study, however, Black and Hispanic participants did not lose their jobs due to the divorce. One of the participants described obtaining a new job during the initial stages of the divorce. The emotional issues encountered made it difficult for her to concentrate or focus on work. Black and Hispanic women after divorce recognized increasing motivation to develop professionally. With

the advancement of professional development, social outlets increased, and clients saw themselves as having greater resiliency through making positive meaning out of divorce experiences.

This research uncovered contextualized findings with the Wheel of Life Model and support for the Wolfelt's model (2008). The research findings were that the Wheel of Life and Wheel of Wellness work well together for divorced Christian Black and Hispanic women.

Limitations

Limitations on the findings regarding results as seen in data were recognized and expected. There were few Hispanic women in the study because it was difficult to enroll Hispanic women, possibly due to culture or personality limitations. As a result, these findings were more representative of Black women than Hispanic women.

The research involved phone interviews, which limited the engagement with the client's experience due to an inability to see facial or other physical cues from participants to gauge experiences. Some rich data could have been lost in the design choice, but the researcher simplified and neutrally phrased questions, offering continuous clarification to mitigate the limitation.

The research results are not generalizable beyond the specific population of African American/Black and Hispanic women in Texas due to conducting qualitative research with a specific population within a limited geographic location. Research continued with limitations, because it was necessary to recording interviews due to COVID-19 safety and welfare concerns.

Personal experience of divorce might have been a limitation, but a collaborative, not-knowing approach was used to reduce or eliminate researcher bias in interviewing and data analysis. The researcher, possessing the same Christian values as the participants and having had a similar experience, proved to be of help by having an increased compassion and understanding of the participants' lived experiences. With additional participants, the study may have reached different conclusions.

Recommendations

For Mental Health Counselors

Clinical concerns were raised by study participants, who held close ties to their pastor and/or church membership. Participants identified with not feeling understood by pastors, thereby not receiving needed emotional support from church-member relationships. For Christian African American/Black and Hispanic women who came to counseling in the initial divorce stages, clinical focus of the mental health counselor was on postmodern therapies, specifically the use of collaborative language and narrative therapy because these therapies offered collaboration with the client without using scientific or cultural labels. Study participants described experiencing shame, attacking self, or holding blame, for which narrative therapy holds therapeutic processes that help eliminate self-blame. As an example, using techniques such as externalizing conversations helps enlarge hope outcomes for clients because the therapist is working with the client to change the negative internal description, going deeper within to view their own strengths so that a new description of self is formed.

Narrative therapy has also been shown to assist clients who have experienced trauma (Monk et al., 1996). Collaborative language therapy takes a “not knowing” stance,

allowing clients to be the expert of themselves. Both approaches assist clients by allowing them to tell their stories and uncover the full understanding of how their stories have affected their lived experiences. Through the therapy process, clients are assisted to change their view of the problem to one of empowerment (Anderson, 1997; Monk, et al., 1996). Using a constructivist approach by reexamining the problem assists clients who have been marginalized by language and/or cultural constraints to view their infinite potential, thereby increasing hope for their futures post-divorce.

In addition, dialectal behavioral therapy and cognitive behavioral therapy are useful because they each offer specific techniques to assist clients with focus on self-care, reducing distress tolerance and creating meaningful connections. Offering client-specific strategies such as meditation and mindfulness works well with Christian spirituality. Use of practices like the *Examen* or breath prayer may aid the client in reducing anxiety and depression (Cashwell & Young, 2020). Hope-training, based upon hope theory, has been known to be useful for improving a sense of hope within several populations such as children, men, women, and elderly. Hope therapy can be used simultaneously with other therapies to assist divorced Christian Black/African American and Hispanic women increase their sense of hope for the future.

Using the Wheel of Life Model as a part of mental health counselors' intake protocol for assessing the spiritual and overall wellness of Black and Hispanic Christian women was useful and effective with study participants in exploring their balance in life. Further literature supports that the Wheel of Life Model is useful as a tool for coaching clients (Kauffman, 2004). As therapy progresses, mental health counselors can assist clients further by referring them to divorce coaching as a resource to continue receiving

the support they need to move forward. This would be for those who no longer exhibit emotional symptoms of anxiety, depression, or another clinical focus but who are seeking new life goals post-divorce. Positive psychology research shows that coaching helps with increasing hope for continued healing and wellness (Kauffman, 2004). By comparison, divorce coaching may continue to help clients move forward with development of specific life goals and wellness skills.

Further research literature shows that some mental health professionals are not comfortable using clients' culture in their counseling. Others who access their clients' culture including their spirituality in counseling practices believe it improves outcomes (Cashwell & Young, 2020). Mental health counselors using group therapy or group divorce coaching will aid clients in continued healing, allowing clients time to develop new supportive networks post-divorce. As more people experience divorce, mental health counselors will do well to obtain specific, multicultural training on the increased challenges for clients of color. Examples such as compassionate training will help address the needs of divorced Christian African American/Black and Hispanic women who struggle with relationships, including pastoral relationships.

For Church Caregivers

It is recommended that church-based caregivers receive continuing education on compassionate training, which incorporates the combination of evidence-based training, multicultural training, and divorce recovery knowledge to enhance understanding of persons of color in the divorce experience. In addition, education on the use of the Wheel of Life Model as one of the intake tools for assessing the spiritual and overall wellness of Black and Hispanic Christian women will assist caregivers to search within themselves

regarding how they are showing compassion for Black and Hispanic Christian women. Using the Wheel of Life Model and developing specific programs such as Divorce Recovery will be helpful in meeting specific needs of Black and Hispanic Christian women. These programs can also include resources for financial assistance and emotional divorce support groups since research findings showed that Black and Hispanic women often need additional resources and emotional support.

The Black women in the study reached out first to their places of worship for spiritual guidance and emotional healing in divorce recovery. It was found that Divorce Recovery Programs were specifically helpful. Having hope training inhouse, as a part of a Divorce Recovery Program or occurring alongside of a Divorce Recovery Program is beneficial. The role of the pastor and the relationship of divorced Christian women of color with their pastors regarding this topic could be addressed through a class emphasizing the necessity of multicultural training, perhaps through training in seminary, with specific information on areas of concern for people of color. This training could also include when to refer African American/Black and Hispanic women for mental health crisis intervention alongside available community resources.

For Future Research

Utilizing larger sample sizes and case studies may have achieved farther-reaching results, because a larger sample size provides more perspectives and increased experiences to be evaluated. In addition, larger sample sizes open the study to the use of quantitative supportive analysis because it examines descriptors like content analysis. Having a wider timeframe combined with a wider community or looking at a longer time

for persons to make the decision to be interviewed may also be beneficial because this study included Black/African American and Hispanic women of color only within Texas.

Offering a study over a longer time frame with additional women of color in a variety of geographical areas may produce wider perspectives. This study was limited due to a reduction in contact and the willingness of people to engage person-to-person due to COVID-19. Having the opportunity to be in the field with persons observing and procuring more data through a longitudinal study rather than a cross-sectional study by following and working with the person throughout the divorce experience may produce multiple layers of experience for observation during stages of divorce recovery.

This study contains more information on the experiences of Black divorced Christian women; additional research could look solely into the divorce experiences of Christian Hispanic women. Additionally, if research were conducted by a Hispanic mental health practitioner, he or she may obtain an increased sampling of Hispanics because of the researcher's shared culture.

Specific research alternatives are recommended, such as research on divorced Christian Black and Hispanic women, and whether the church treats them with equality when it pertains to women's divorce issues. Other recommendations include research on the relationship that Black and Hispanic Christian women have with their pastors which affects their divorce experience; specifically, the ongoing effects of disenfranchised grief from women of color as they undergo divorce. Additionally, beneficial research could discover how the church can support women of color and their divorce experiences through the creation of safe spaces within the life of the church, such as in pastoral relationships due to cultural implications in these demographics for enjoying a personal

spiritual relationship with one's pastor. Future research is encouraged on gray divorce with Black and Hispanic Christian women as this study included only middle-aged and younger women. Older divorced persons, having been married for several years and coupled with being in middle aged and older, may have additional concerns than those who were divorced at a younger age.

More extensive research using the Wheel of Life Model would be beneficial for groups, such as effects of divorce on adult Christian children of divorce and deeper exploration of one life function on the Wheel, such as spirituality or health. In this study, the Wheel of Life Model proved to be a good resource to identify individual growth in life areas. Spirituality and health were two of the major themes for the participants in this study.

Implications

According to Doka (2009), disenfranchised grief is grief that is not acknowledged publicly or supported socially. The research could not confirm that disenfranchised grief was the cause of what the participants experienced since they were not trying to keep the grief and loss experience to themselves. This study, however, produced valuable insight for church caregivers when Christian divorced women seek godly wisdom from their pastors or church leaders. Ideally, these findings will result in a heightened level of compassion from pastors, church members, and church leaders when individuals are experiencing divorce issues.

Additionally, church caregivers need to understand when to refer clients who have been described as hopeless while faced with a great loss such as divorce. They also need to understand that there is a difference between attending church and having faith in God.

Pastoral relationships with congregants can be powerful and can negatively affect a person's trust in furthering Christian relationships. The church can become a safe, nonjudgmental space where broken people can worship and sense active support.

Multicultural support groups for women of color in their Christian places of worship would also benefit this demographic. When people cannot get support from the primary communities upon which they have leaned in the past, mental health counseling from spiritual leaders becomes even more important since life goes on after trauma and tragedy, and can be experienced with a renewed sense of hope and health.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this qualitative study explored the lived experiences of divorced Black and Hispanic Christian women. As this research was conducted, perceptions were realized regarding the divorce experiences of participants who had differing levels of practicing Christian faith with some of the variables such as finances, impacting some more than others. The five themes emerging from the key aspects of their experiences were health, relationships, spirituality, finances, and life goals. It is essential to understand how Black and Hispanic Christian women are resilient in their divorce experiences. Hope is highly relevant for these women as they seek support from their houses of worship; thus, Christian caregivers and mental health professionals have the opportunity to respond to these women's needs appropriately. This research is a guide for continued exploration.

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Appendix A

Interview Questions

Health

Emotional Health

1. How did you experience emotions due to the divorce?
2. What are the emotional feelings that you had before and after the divorce?
3. How did you experience the change in the family structure that you had before the divorce?
4. Did your emotional feelings regarding your faith affect your divorce experience? If so, how?
5. How did your Christian spirituality affect the grief process during and after the divorce?
6. Did you seek a spiritual Christian pastor to help you in your healing journey? If not, anyone else?

Physical Health

1. How did your divorce experience impact your physical health?
2. How did your Christian faith affect taking care of your physical health?
3. How has culture affected your feelings about taking care of your physical and emotional health?

Career

1. How has the divorce affected your work?
2. How does your racial/ethnic status affect your beliefs on your divorce experience?

Finances

1. How were your finances affected by divorce?
2. How have your spiritual beliefs affected your thoughts on your financial status?

Relationships

1. How are your relationships with friends, coworkers, and church members impacted by the divorce experience? If it was affected, was it more before the divorce or after the divorce?
2. How did the divorce impact your relationship with yourself? If so, why?
3. How has your Christian faith increased or decreased your relationship with God?

Created by Phyllis G Collins, MS, LPC, LMFT

Intellectual Pursuits

Did you use hobbies, volunteering to assist you in adjusting to your new life after divorce? If so, what was your experience?

Life Goals

1. How did you choose to create new life goals after the divorce?
2. How have your life goals changed following the divorce?
3. How has your ethnicity/race impacted your life goal decisions during and after divorce?
4. How have your Christian beliefs influenced your decisions during and after divorce?

Children (if participants have children)

1. How do you use your Christian faith to express your feelings about the new family dynamic?
2. How has culture impacted your ideas about relationships now with your children and ex-spouse?

Created by Phyllis G Collins, MS, LPC, LMFT

Appendix B

Houston Graduate School of Theology Doctor of Professional Counseling Program Consent for Participation in Research

The Influence of Christian Spirituality on the Emotional Responses to Divorce Experiences of African American and Hispanic Women

Why am I being asked?

You are being asked to participate in a research study investigating the lived experiences of post divorced African American/Black and Hispanic/Latino Women in Texas, conducted by Phyllis G Collins, a doctoral candidate in counseling at the Houston Graduate School of Theology. I am conducting research under the direction of Dr. Jake Porter. You are being asked to participate in the research because you identified as a Black/African American or Hispanic/Latino woman with Christian beliefs post-divorced residing in Texas.

Project Description

This study investigates the lived experiences of African American/Black and Hispanic/Latino women post-divorce in Texas. The research aims to show a direct association between the type of emotional response and the nature of the experience that triggers the reaction; that their emotional response to divorce depends upon other individual factors such as coping with emotions and the emotional investment in the marriage relationship, which was broken by the traumatic experience of divorce. The study investigates the influence of Christianity on these women's lives and how their religious beliefs affect their emotional response to pre-divorce and post-divorce experiences and assist them with more excellent resiliency.

Procedures Involved:

Potential participants will be asked the following: Potential participants will be provided informed consent with information on the details of the study, including the risk and benefits. The interview will take place through a recorded phone call or by recorded zoom face-to-face meeting. Each interview will last approximately 45-60 minutes. The interviewer will use a semi-structured interview protocol. All interviews will be transcribed and recorded for data analysis. All identifying participant information will be removed from the transcription. Approximately 10-15 participants could be involved in this study.

Benefits and risks

There is no immediate benefit to you other than personal gratification, contributing to increasing the knowledge of how women of color are resilient after divorce; hope for providing greater supports for women of color post-divorce. There is no compensation, payment, or reimbursement for participation. The potential risks are minimum. However, participants reflecting upon past emotional events may increase awareness of past traumatic experiences and affect her mood. If, in any event, you are injured during the research study, you should contact your physician. However, you or your third-party payor are responsible for payment of any needed treatment. There is no compensation from Houston Graduate School of Theology or the researcher, Phyllis G Collins, except where required by law. If you feel you have been injured, you may contact the researcher, Phyllis G. Collins, at (832)930-6718 or Dr. Jay Porter at (713)942-9505 jporter@hgst.edu.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this project is voluntary, and you are free to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time without penalty.

Use of Data Collected

Results may be presented at conferences, in publications, and posted on the internet. No personally identifying information will be stored or disseminated with the results. Pseudonyms will only refer to participants. All typed transcripts will be held for a maximum of 3 years on a password-protected file on the researcher's hard drive and USB protected. You will be able to review the transcribed interview.

Confidentiality of Records

Your confidentiality will be maintained by placing only a code number and no personally identifying information in the resulting data files. We will keep track of who participated in the experiment, and this information will be confidential, but we will not be able to tell which participant produced which data file. When required by law, the records of this research may be reviewed by applicable government agencies.

Participant's Rights Information

If you have any questions concerning your rights as a research subject, you may contact the Director of the Doctor of Professional Counseling Program, Dr. Jake Porter, at (713)942-9505 jporter@hgst.edu

Participant's Consent

The study has been described to me. I have read the above information. I have been allowed to ask questions, and if there have been questions, the questions have been answered satisfactorily. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation in the project without penalty. I attest that I am at least 18 years of age. I also understand that the study results will be treated in strict confidence and reported as group data sets without personally identifying information, possibly in scholarly publications. I understand that if I have any questions or concerns about this experiment, I may pose them to Phyllis G. Collins 832-930-6718 or Dr. Jake Porter (713)942-9505 or jporter@hgst.edu. I agree to participate in this study. I have received a copy of this consent form.

I have read and understood the above information, and I consent to participate in this study by signing below.

Signature

Date

Audio Recording Release Consent

A video and audio recording will be made of you during your participation in this research project for transcription purposes only and to better interface with one another. All is voluntary. The transcriptions will be typed. You will be able to review the transcribed information. Upon completion of the research study, all typed transcriptions and audio recordings will be available for three years. After three years, all the data will be destroyed. You may request the recording be stopped at any time and erase any portion of your recording.

Your name (printed): _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix C

Initial Codebook

After Divorce Career(ADC)	1
No Impact	5
Work Harder/Independent	2
After Divorce Emotions (ADE)	1
anger	2
Confused	1
disbelief	2
Mental Health Counselor	2
No	0
Yes	0
Relief	4
Sadness	3
After Divorce Finances (ADF)	0
Increased stress	3
more money	5
After Divorce Intellectual Pursuits(ADIP)	3
None	2
After Divorce Life Goals (ADLG)	0
New Life Goals	6
None	1
After Divorce Physical Health (ADPH)	5
After Divorce Relationships (ADR)	2
Coworkers	3
Family	4
Children	5
biological children	1
Step children	1
None	0
Ex-spouse	6
In-laws	1
Friends	4
Self	6
Self blame	1
 After Divorce Spiritual Career (ADSC)	 0
After Divorce Spiritual Emotions((ADSE)	0
faith and prayer	5
Spiritual Christian Pastor (SCP)	1
No	1
No Impact	2

After Divorce Spiritual Finances (ADSF)	0
Impacted	3
No Impact	2
After Divorce Spiritual Intellectual Pursuits (ADSIP)	0
After Divorce Spiritual Life Goals (ADSL)	0
After Divorce Spiritual Physical Health (ADSPH)	2
exercised	1
Meditation	2
After Divorce Spiritual Relationships (ADSR)	1
Church Members and Pastor	6
Family	0
Children	0
Coworkers	0
Ex-Spouse	0
In-Laws	0
Friends	0
Relationship with God	7
Increased	4
Self	1
Embarrassed	2
No Impact	1
Pre-Divorced Career (PDC)	0
Impact	7
Pre-Divorced Emotions (PDE)	2
Anger	4
Confused	1
Depression	3
Hopeless	4
Mental Health Counselor	4
Yes	0
Pre-Divorced Finances (PDF)	0
Less Money	7
Pre-Divorced Intellectual Pursuits (PDI)	5
Pre-Divorced Life Goals (PDLG)	0
Pre-Divorced Physical Health (PDPH)	3
Physically tired	1
weight loss	4
Pre-Divorced Relationships (PDR)	3
Co-Workers	4
Family	4
Children	1
Ex-Spouse	2
In-Laws	2

Friends	2
Self	7
Pre-Divorced Spiritual Career (PDSC)	0
Pre-Divorced Spiritual Emotions (PDSE)	2
Grief	5
No Impact	1
Pre-Divorced Spiritual Finances (PDSF)	0
Impact	4
No Impact	4
Pre-Divorced Spiritual Intellectual Pursuits (PDSIP)	0
Pre-Divorced Spiritual Life Goals (PSLG)	0
New Life Goals	1
Pre-Divorced Spiritual Physical Health (PDSPH)	3
None	3
Pre-Divorced Spiritual Relationships (PDSR)	0
Church Members and Pastor	3
Co-Workers	1
Family and Friends	2
Relationship with God	3
None	1
Self	0
Pre-Divorced Spiritual Relationships	3

Appendix D

Overlapping and Irrelevant Information to be Deleted

After Divorce Career(ADC)	1
No Impact	5
Work Harder/Independent	2
After Divorce Emotions (ADE)	1
anger	2
Confused	1
disbelief	2
Mental Health Counselor	2
Relief	4
Sadness	3
After Divorce Finances (ADF)	
Increased stress	3
more money	5
After Divorce Intellectual Pursuits(ADIP)	3
None	2
After Divorce Life Goals (ADLG)	
New Life Goals	6
None	1
After Divorce Physical Health (ADPH)	5
After Divorce Relationships (ADR)	2
Coworkers	3
Family	4
Children	5
biological children	1
Step children	1
Ex-spouse	6
In-laws	1
Friends	4
Self	6
Self blame	1
After Divorce Spiritual Career (ADSC)	
After Divorce Spiritual Emotions (ADSE)	
faith and prayer	5
Spiritual Christian Pastor (SCP)	1
No	1
No Impact	2
After Divorce Spiritual Finances (ADSF)	
Impacted	3
No Impact	2

After Divorce Spiritual Intellectual Pursuits (ADSIP)	
After Divorce Spiritual Life Goals (ADSL)	
After Divorce Spiritual Physical Health (ADSPH)	2
exercised	1
Meditation	2
After Divorce Spiritual Relationships (ADSR)	1
Church Members and Pastor	6
Relationship with God	7
Increased	4
Self	1
Embarrassed	2
No Impact	1
Pre-Divorced Career (PDC)	
Impact	7
Pre-Divorced Emotions (PDE)	2
Anger	4
Confused	1
Depression	3
Hopeless	4
Mental Health Counselor	4
Pre-Divorced Finances (PDF)	
Less Money	7
Pre-Divorced Intellectual Pursuits (PDI)	5
Pre-Divorced Life Goals (PDLG)	
Pre-Divorced Physical Health (PDPH)	3
Physically tired	1
weight loss	4
Pre-Divorced Relationships (PDR)	3
Co-Workers	4
Family	4
Children	1
Ex-Spouse	2
In-Laws	2
Friends	2
Self	7
Pre-Divorced Spiritual Career (PDSC)	
Pre-Divorced Spiritual Emotions (PDSE)	2
Grief	5
No Impact	1
Pre-Divorced Spiritual Finances (PDSF)	
Impact	4
No Impact	4
Pre-Divorced Spiritual Intellectual Pursuits (PDSIP)	

Pre-Divorced Spiritual Life Goals (PSLG)

New Life Goals 1

Pre-Divorced Spiritual Physical Health (PDSPH) 3

None 3

Pre-Divorced Spiritual Relationships (PDSR)

Church Members and Pastor 3

Co-Workers 1

Family and Friends 2

Relationship with God 3

None 1

Pre-Divorced Spiritual Relationships 3

Appendix E

Coding Sheet

Grouping information, (continuing to reduce data by reducing any overlapping or not relevant) to gather themes

After Divorce Career(ADC)	1	Self	1
No Impact	5	Embarrassed	2
Work Harder/Independent	2	No Impact	1
After Divorce Emotions (ADE)	1	Pre- Divorce Career (PDC)	
anger	2	Impact	7
Confused	1	Pre-Divorced Emotions (PDE)	2
Disbelief	2	Anger	4
Mental Health Counselor	2	Confused	1
Relief	4	Depression	3
Sadness	3	Hopeless	4
After Divorce Finances (ADF)		Mental Health Counselor	4
Increased stress	3	Pre-Divorced Finances (PDF)	
more money	5	Less Money	7
After Divorce Intellectual Pursuits(ADIP)	3	Pre-Divorced Intellectual Pursuits (PDI)	5
After Divorce Life Goals (ADLG)		Pre-Divorced Life Goals (PDLG)	
New Life Goals	6	Pre-Divorced Physical Health (PDPH)	3
After Divorce Physical Health (ADPH)	5	Physically tired	1
After Divorce Relationships (ADR)		weight loss	4
Coworkers	3	Pre-Divorced Relationships (PDR)	3
Family	4	Co-Workers	4
Children	5	Family	4
biological children	1	Children	1
Step children	1	Ex-Spouse	2
exspouse	6	In-Laws	2
Inlaws	3	Friends	2
Friends	4	Self	7
Self	6	Pre-Divorced Spiritual Career (PDSC)	
Self Blame	1	Pre-Divorced Spiritual Emotions (PDSE)	2
After Divorce Spiritual Career (ADSC)		Grief	5
After Divorce Spiritual Emotions (ADSE)		No Impact	1
faith and prayer	5	Pre-Divorced Spiritual Finances (PDSF)	
Spiritual Christian Pastor (SCP)	1	Impact	4
No Impact	2	No Impact	4
After Divorce Spiritual Finances (ADSF)		Pre-Divorced Spiritual Intellectual Pursuits (PDSIP)	
Impacted	3	Pre-Divorced Spiritual Life Goals (PSLG)	
After Divorce Spiritual Intellectual Pursuits (ADSIP)		New Life Goals	1
After Divorce Spiritual Life Goals (ADSL)		Pre-Divorced Spiritual Physical Health (PDSPH)	3
After Divorce Spiritual Physical Health (ADSPH)	2	None	3
Exercised	1	Pre-Divorced Spiritual Relationships (PDSR)	
Meditation	2	Church Members and Pastor	3
After Divorce Spiritual Relationships (ADSR)	1	Co-Workers	1
Church Members and Pastor	6	Family and Friends	2
Relationship with God	7	Relationship with God	3
Increased	4	Pre-Divorced Spiritual Relationships	3

Appendix F

Notes

1. Created a codebook of information that surrounds the framework that the research is based upon and the responses of the participants in the research study. Code Sheet one reflects the overall codes used to code the data. These codes include all of the codes that were applied extensively, as well as those that are not explained. The items in bold are the parent code. The information underneath them is the child code.
2. Code Sheet number two, is the first sheet in the data reduction process. The researcher reviewed the codes in more detail. The researcher removed codes that were not used by deleting overlapping, repetitive information and by taking out information that does not have an actual participant response. Researcher reviewed codes that were similar, and, in some instances, the researcher combined information within categories that are relevant to the research. As the researcher was going through the data, it was necessary to rename or relabel the code and in other instances, further eliminated codes that were not relevant to the research. For example, some categories are too broad within the initial parent code. As the researcher was going through the data, the researcher had to rename and relabel to reflect the information presented. For example, the researcher initially coded with the word impact, however, when the researcher went back to the reduction, the researcher reviewed the transcript, to get the detail of what the impact was in the coding; and discovered what it was specifically speaking to and needed to modify the title of the subtheme.

3. Once the codes were reduced the researcher began looking at the patterns to see first, and foremost can pre- and post-divorce be done. Maybe it didn't make sense to do this. The researcher looked at patterns that were either (Health) emotional health and physical health; spiritual, relationship, financial, and life goals. Further, researcher reviewed each of the participants quotes along with codes that were applied to them and made further decisions around what to eliminate, what to combine, which led to these themes and subthemes.